



Washington State Fusion Center INFOCUS



FRIDAY — 29 JUL 2022

	International	National	Regional and Local
Events, Opportunities Go to articles	07/29 Day 156 of the Russia invasion 07/29 Trading blame for POW prison shelling 07/29 Europe's quest: shrink energy demand 07/29 Wounded Russians compensation elusive 07/29 Russia FM: prisoner exchange phone call 07/29 Ukraine lowers Russian war crime sentence 07/29 Isolation complication; hard to shun Russia 07/29 Russia space chief: no date for ISS pullout 07/29 NKorea threatens to use nuclear weapons 07/29 Russia: 'one China' policy Taiwan 07/29 Eurozone inflation hits record 8.9% 07/29 Ukraine harvest piles up everywhere 07/28 Ukraine forces reclaim lost advantage? 07/28 Sanctions crippling Russia's economy 07/28 Russia minister 'Soviet Union would return' 07/28 China leaders: will miss growth targets 07/28 Businesses brace: China economic fallout 07/28 German inflation 8.5%; high energy prices 07/28 India eyes China ship visit to Sri Lanka	07/29 Appalachia flooding: death toll rising 07/28 Los Angeles County avoids new mask rule 07/28 NY declares 'imminent public health threat' 07/28 San Francisco cites monkeypox emergency 07/28 HHS criticizes states' monkeypox response 07/28 Staff shortages choking health care system 07/28 Virginia flooding, state of emergency 07/28 Kentucky flash flooding turns deadly 07/28 Heavy rain, more flooding St Louis area 07/28 Wildfire: 70+ large fires, 3M acres, 12 states 07/28 Big tech resilient as economy cools 07/28 Jobless claims hold near highest level year 07/28 Baby boomers face spike in homelessness 07/28 New data fans concerns of recession 07/28 Economy all but officially in recession 07/28 Is there an official definition of recession? 07/28 China's shadow looms over US 07/28 China's Xi warns Biden over Taiwan 07/28 Reward: Russia election interference info	07/28 Excessive heat warning continues 07/28 Torrid heatwave Pacific Northwest 07/28 Heat doubles firefighters call volume 07/28 Health experts recommend: wear mask 07/28 King Co. monkeypox infections doubling 07/28 Truck cargo liquid oxygen explodes on I-5 07/28 Ferry crashes Seattle dock, heavy damage 07/28 Overheated power strip in Federal Way fire 07/28 Duwamish Tribe excluded from Seattle IAC 07/28 Encampment sweep: no one accepted help 07/28 Normal wildfire season Inland Northwest? 07/28 Ferndale postal service slow deliveries
Cyber Awareness Go to articles	07/28 Exposed: ransomware cybercriminals 07/28 Fewer ransomware victims choose to pay 07/28 LockBit success: technical sophistication 07/28 SharpTongue clever mail stealing malware	07/28 IPFS: the new hotbed of phishing 07/28 Phishing threat mirrors landing pages 07/28 Phishing campaign targeted 10,000 firms 07/28 Detroit city retirees' data breach concern 07/28 Health records breached 2022: 22M so far 07/28 Microsoft SQL servers hacked: bandwidth 07/28 Saudi Arabia critical cybersecurity partner 07/28 Federal court system sophisticated breach 07/28 Concern: 50 companies breached via MSP 07/28 American Dental Association data stolen	
Terror Conditions Go to articles	07/29 Australia charges man w/terror support 07/28 Al Shabab attempted Ethiopia invasion?	07/28 Domestic violent extremism threat 07/28 'Huge potential' for terror on rail lines 07/28 Snag in pretrial hearing USS Cole bombing	
Suspicious, Unusual Go to articles	07/29 Climate change melting Alps' glaciers	07/29 Mystery in couple's ID theft case 07/28 Officers: ICE can't find border jumpers	07/28 DOH: avoid Orcas Island shellfish
Crime, Criminals Go to articles	07/29 New Zealand: 15yr-old boy sentenced to life	07/28 FBI: suspect wanted to kill 3 justices 07/28 Data: 1-in-3 killed by police were 'fleeing' 07/28 Anger: video of police beating pinned teen 07/28 Detainees sue Indiana jail: rapes, assaults 07/28 Georgia woman dies falling out of patrol car 07/28 Uvalde school principal reinstated 07/27 FBI investigates leader of 'Rapekrieg' group	07/28 Mayor orders SPD assign sex assault cases 07/28 Downtown Spokane 4 suspected arson fires

[DISCLAIMER and FAIR USE Notice](#)

Events, Opportunities

[Top of page](#)

HEADLINE	07/29 NKorea threatens to use nuclear weapons
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/covid-health-seoul-south-korea-nuclear-weapons-e285be60ef404092fe3324748fa60707
GIST	SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — North Korean leader Kim Jong Un warned he's ready to use his nuclear weapons in potential military conflicts with the United States and South Korea, state media said Thursday, as he unleashed fiery rhetoric against rivals he says are pushing the Korean Peninsula to the brink of war.

Kim's speech to war veterans on the 69th anniversary of the end of the 1950-53 Korean War was apparently meant to boost internal unity in the impoverished country amid pandemic-related economic difficulties. While Kim has increasingly threatened his rivals with nuclear weapons, it's unlikely that he would use them first against the superior militaries of the U.S. and its allies, observers say.

"Our armed forces are completely prepared to respond to any crisis, and our country's nuclear war deterrent is also ready to mobilize its absolute power dutifully, exactly and swiftly in accordance with its mission," Kim said in Wednesday's speech, according to the official Korean Central News Agency.

He accused the United States of "demonizing" North Korea to justify its hostile policies. Kim said regular U.S.-South Korea military drills that he claimed target the North highlight U.S. "double standards" and "gangster-like" aspects because it brands North Korea's routine military activities — an apparent reference to its missile tests — as provocations or threats.

Kim also alleged the new South Korean government of President Yoon Suk Yeol is led by "confrontation maniacs" and "gangsters" who have gone further than previous South Korean conservative governments. Since taking office in May, the Yoon government has moved to strengthen Seoul's military alliance with the United States and bolster its own capacity to neutralize North Korean nuclear threats including a preemptive strike capability.

"Talking about military action against our nation, which possesses absolute weapons that they fear the most, is preposterous and is very dangerous suicidal action," Kim said. "Such a dangerous attempt will be immediately punished by our powerful strength and the Yoon Suk Yeol government and his military will be annihilated."

South Korea expressed "deep regret" over Kim's threat and said it maintains a readiness to cope with any provocation by North Korea in "a powerful, effective manner."

In a statement read by spokesperson Kang In-sun, Yoon's presidential national security office said South Korea will safeguard its national security and citizens' safety based on a solid alliance with the United States. It urged North Korea to return to talks to take steps toward denuclearization.

Earlier Thursday, South Korea's Defense Ministry repeated its earlier position that it's been boosting its military capacity and joint defense posture with the United States to cope with escalating North Korean nuclear threats.

In April, Kim said North Korea could preemptively use nuclear weapons if threatened, saying they would "never be confined to the single mission of war deterrent." Kim's military has also test-launched nuclear-capable missiles that place both the U.S. mainland and South Korea within striking distance. U.S. and South Korean officials have repeatedly said in the past few months that North Korea is ready to conduct its first nuclear test in five years.

Kim is seeking greater public support as his country's economy has been battered by pandemic-related border shutdowns, U.S.-led sanctions and his own mismanagement. In May, North Korea also admitted to its first COVID-19 outbreak, though the scale of illness and death is widely disputed in a country that lacks the modern medical capacity to handle it.

"Kim's rhetoric inflates external threats to justify his militarily focused and economically struggling regime," said Leif-Eric Easley, a professor at Ewha University in Seoul. "North Korea's nuclear and missile programs are in violation of international law, but Kim tries to depict his destabilizing arms buildup as a righteous effort at self-defense."

Experts say North Korea will likely intensify its threats against the U.S. and South Korea as the allies prepare to expand summertime exercises. In recent years, the South Korean and U.S. militaries have canceled or downsized some of their regular exercises due to concerns about COVID-19 and to support

	<p>now-stalled U.S.-led diplomacy aimed at convincing North Korea to give up its nuclear program in return for economic and political benefits.</p> <p>During Wednesday's speech, Kim said his government recently set tasks to improve its military capability more speedily to respond to military pressure campaigns by its enemies, suggesting that he intends to go ahead with an expected nuclear test.</p> <p>But Cheong Seong-Chang at the private Sejong Institute in South Korea said North Korea won't likely conduct its nuclear test before China, its major ally and biggest aid benefactor, holds its Communist Party convention in the autumn. He said China worries that a North Korean nuclear test could give the United States a justification to boost its security partnerships with its allies that it could use to check Chinese influence in the region.</p> <p>North Korea recently said it is moving to overcome the COVID-19 outbreak amid plummeting fever cases, but experts say it's unclear if the country can lift its strict restrictions soon because it could face a viral resurgence later this year. During Wednesday's event, Kim, veterans and others didn't wear masks, state media photos showed. On Thursday, North Korea reported 11 fever cases, a huge drop from the peak of about 400,000 a day in May.</p> <p>North Korea has rejected U.S. and South Korean offers for medical relief items. It has also said it won't return to talks with the United States unless it first abandons its hostile policies on the North, in an apparent reference to U.S.-led sanctions and U.S.-South Korean military drills.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	07/29 Russia space chief: no date for ISS pullout
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-putin-science-moscow-fb690f31f4850a10579fe71e3a3198b3
GIST	<p>MOSCOW (AP) — The head of Russia's space agency said Friday that the country has not set a date for pulling out of the International Space Station and that the timing would depend on the orbiting outpost's condition.</p> <p>Yuri Borisov, who was appointed this month to lead the Roscosmos state space corporation, told President Vladimir Putin this week that a decision was made for Russia to leave the station after 2024 and to focus on building its own orbiting station.</p> <p>NASA and its partners hope to continue operating the 24-year-old International Space Station until 2030, and the Russian announcement threw that plan into doubt.</p> <p>Speaking Friday in televised remarks, Borisov said Russia will start the process of leaving the station after 2024 but the exact timing would "depend on the International Space Station's condition."</p> <p>The space station, which has served as a symbol of post-Cold War international cooperation, is now one of the last remaining areas of cooperation between Russia and the West amid the tensions over Moscow's military action in Ukraine.</p> <p>The Russian announcement fueled speculation it was part of Moscow's maneuvering to win relief from Western sanctions over the conflict in Ukraine.</p> <p>Borisov's predecessor as Roscosmos chief, Dmitry Rogozin, said last month that Moscow could take part in negotiations about a possible extension of the station's operations only if the U.S. lifted its sanctions against Russian space industries.</p> <p>Borisov insisted his agency's decision wasn't related to politics. "There are no political aspects here, and I believe there shouldn't be any," he said.</p>

	<p>“The International Space Station has enriched science with knowledge about the Earth and about the universe and brought us all together,” Borisov said. “Such projects should stay away from politics. I’m sorry that our joint space projects that are important for the entire humankind are getting a political tinge. It’s wrong.”</p> <p>NASA officials said they had yet to hear directly from their Russian counterparts on the matter. NASA Administrator Bill Nelson issued a statement saying the agency was “committed to the safe operation” of the space station through 2030 and continues “to build future capabilities to assure our major presence in low-Earth orbit.”</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	07/29 Appalachia flooding: death toll rising
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/floods-storms-kentucky-f3b72930d5d1994066752eaa8c6d1462
GIST	<p>JACKSON, Ky. (AP) — Search and rescue teams backed by the National Guard searched Friday for people missing in record floods that wiped out entire communities in some of the poorest places in America. Kentucky’s governor said 15 people have died, a toll he expected to grow as the rain keeps falling.</p> <p>“We’ve still got a lot of searching to do,” said Jerry Stacy, the emergency management director in Kentucky’s hard-hit Perry County. “We still have missing people.”</p> <p>Powerful floodwaters swallowed towns that hug creeks and streams in Appalachian valleys and hollows, leaving vehicles in useless piles, crunching runaway equipment and piles of debris against bridges and swamping homes and businesses. Mudslides on steep slopes left many people marooned and without power and made rescues more difficult.</p> <p>“It is devastating,” Gov. Andy Beshear told CNN before touring the disaster area. “Our number of Kentuckians we’ve lost is now at 15. I expect it to more than double. And it’s going to include some children.”</p> <p>While floodwaters receded in places after peaking Thursday, the National Weather Service said flash flooding caused by excessive rainfall remained possible through Friday evening.</p> <p>“Places where there were mobile homes and houses, there’s nothing there now ... It’s unbelievable to see,” Stacy said. “You get 8 inches of rain in three hours, it’s just not anything that we have ever seen -- ever, here.”</p> <p>THIS IS A BREAKING NEWS UPDATE. AP’s earlier story follows below.</p> <p>JACKSON, Ky. (AP) — Krystal Holbrook’s family started moving possessions to higher ground long before dawn, racing to save them from the rapidly rising floodwaters that were menacing southeastern Kentucky.</p> <p>Her family scurried in the dark to move vehicles, campers, trailers and equipment. But as the water kept rising Thursday — leaving at least eight people dead and hundreds without homes in Kentucky -- they began to worry that they might run out of higher ground.</p> <p>“We felt we had most of it moved out of the way,” Holbrook said. “But right now, we’re still moving vehicles even to higher ground. Higher ground is getting a little bit difficult.”</p> <p>The same was true throughout the region, as another round of rainfall loomed in an area already hammered by days of torrential rainfall. The storm sent water gushing from hillsides and surging out of streambeds in Appalachia, inundating homes, businesses and roads. Rescue crews used helicopters and boats to pick up people trapped by floodwaters. Parts of western Virginia and southern West Virginia were also hit by flooding.</p>

Kentucky Gov. Andy Beshear asked for prayers as the region braced for more rain.

“In a word, this event is devastating,” Beshear said Thursday. “And I do believe it will end up being one of the most significant, deadly floods that we have had in Kentucky in at least a very long time.”

Beshear warned that property damage in Kentucky would be extensive and opened an online portal for donations that would go to residents affected by the flooding.

In Whitesburg, Kentucky, floodwaters seeped into Appalshop, an arts and education center renowned for promoting and preserving the region’s history and culture.

“We’re not sure exactly the full damage because we haven’t been able to safely go into the building or really get too close to it,” said Meredith Scalos, its communications director. “We do know that some of our archival materials have flooded out of the building into Whitesburg streets.”

Meanwhile, dangerous conditions and continued rainfall hampered rescue efforts Thursday, the governor said.

“We’ve got a lot of people that need help that we can’t get to at the moment,” he said. “We will.”

Flash flooding and mudslides were reported across the mountainous region of eastern Kentucky, western Virginia and southern West Virginia, where thunderstorms dumped several inches of rain over the past few days.

With more rain expected in the area, the National Weather Service said additional flooding was possible into Friday in much of West Virginia, eastern Kentucky and southwest Virginia.

Poweroutage.us reported more than 33,000 customers remained without electricity Friday in eastern Kentucky, West Virginia and Virginia, with the bulk of the outages in Kentucky.

Rescue crews worked feverishly to try to reach people trapped by the floodwaters.

“There are a lot of people in eastern Kentucky on top of roofs waiting to be rescued,” Beshear said Thursday. “There are a number of people that are unaccounted for, and I’m nearly certain this is a situation where we are going to lose some of them.”

In eastern Kentucky’s Perry County, Emergency Management Director Jerry Stacy described the widespread flooding as a “catastrophic event.”

“Extreme flash flooding and mudslides are just everywhere,” Stacy said, speaking with The Associated Press by phone Thursday as he struggled to reach his office in Hazard.

The storms hit an Appalachian mountain region where communities and homes are often perched on steep hillsides or set deep in the hollows between them, where creeks and streams can rise in a hurry. But this one is far worse than a typical flood, said Stacy, 54.

“I’ve lived here in Perry County all my life and this is by the far the worst event I’ve ever seen,” he said.

Roads in many areas weren’t passable after as much as 6 inches (15 centimeters) of rain had fallen in some spots by Thursday, and 1 to 3 more inches (2.5 to 7.5 centimeters) could fall, the National Weather Service said.

Beshear said he deployed National Guard soldiers to the hardest-hit areas, and three parks in the region were opened as shelters for displaced people.

	<p>The city of Hazard urged people on Facebook to stay off roads and “pray for a break in the rain.”</p> <p>In West Virginia’s Greenbrier County, firefighters pulled people from flooded homes, and five campers who got stranded by high water in Nicholas County were rescued, WCHS-TV reported.</p> <p>Gov. Jim Justice declared a state of emergency for six counties in West Virginia after severe thunderstorms this week caused significant local flooding, downed trees, power outages and blocked roads.</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	07/29 Russia FM: prisoner exchange phone call
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/07/29/world/europe/brittney-griner-prisoner-exchange-russia.html
GIST	<p>Russia’s foreign minister said on Friday that he would propose a convenient date for a phone call with Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken to discuss a possible prisoner exchange.</p> <p>The Biden administration has offered to hand over Viktor Bout, the imprisoned Russian arms dealer, in exchange for the release of the American basketball star Brittney Griner and the former U.S. Marine Paul N. Whelan, both of whom are in custody in Russia, according to a person familiar with the talks.</p> <p>The two Americans have become pawns in a high-stakes diplomatic game as relations between Moscow and Washington have deteriorated sharply since Russia’s invasion of Ukraine on Feb. 24.</p> <p>On Wednesday, Mr. Blinken said that Washington had “put a substantial proposal on the table,” although he declined to discuss the details. He added that he planned to discuss the proposal soon with his Russian counterpart, Sergey V. Lavrov, whom he has not spoken to since Russia invaded Ukraine more than five months ago.</p> <p>During a trip to Uzbekistan on Friday, Mr. Lavrov said that he had learned about Mr. Blinken’s statement from television during a visit to Africa this week. He said that any phone conversation between the two men would have to be conducted from his office and that Russia had asked the American side “to clarify the questions they want to discuss.”</p> <p>Mr. Lavrov said that the question of prisoner exchanges had been discussed during a January meeting in Geneva between President Biden and President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia, and both leaders ordered their government agencies to discuss it further. Mr. Lavrov said that his ministry was not involved in that discussion, but that he would listen to what Mr. Blinken has to say.</p> <p>The American government has come under increased pressure from relatives of U.S. citizens to get them released from Russian prisons.</p> <p>Ms. Griner, a W.N.B.A. star who had been playing for a Russian team during the off-season, is on trial in a Russian court and faces a sentence of up to 10 years in prison on drug charges. The 31-year-old athlete was detained in a Moscow airport about a week before Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, and customs officials discovered hashish oil in her luggage.</p> <p>Mr. Whelan was detained in 2018 in a Moscow hotel, where he had been staying for a friend’s wedding. In 2020, a Russian court sentenced him to 16 years in prison for espionage, a charge that he and his family have denied.</p> <p>Mr. Bout is serving a 25-year federal prison sentence for conspiring to sell weapons to people who said they planned to kill Americans. Russia has denounced Mr. Bout’s prosecution in America as politically motivated.</p>

	In April, after an elaborate diplomatic mission , Russia released Trevor Reed, another former Marine, in exchange for Konstantin Yaroshenko, a Russian pilot who had been sentenced to a lengthy prison term in the United States on cocaine trafficking charges.
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	07/29 Russia: 'one China' policy on Taiwan
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/world/russia-supports-beijings-one-china-policy-lavrov-2022-07-29/
GIST	<p>July 29 (Reuters) - Russia supports Beijing's "One China" policy on the issue of Taiwan, Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said on Friday after Chinese President Xi Jinping warned U.S. President Joe Biden not to play with fire over the island.</p> <p>"Our position on the existence of only one China remains unchanged," Lavrov told reporters in Tashkent. "We have no problem with upholding the principle of China's sovereignty."</p> <p>Beijing has issued escalating warnings about repercussions should House Speaker Nancy Pelosi visit Taiwan, which says it is facing increasing Chinese military and economic threats.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	07/28 India eyes China ship visit Sri Lanka
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/india-says-it-is-monitoring-reports-chinese-vessels-planned-visit-sri-lanka-2022-07-28/
GIST	<p>NEW DELHI/COLOMBO, July 28 (Reuters) - India, which is trying to expand its influence in crisis-hit Sri Lanka after China made deep inroads there, said on Thursday it was aware of reports about the planned visit of a Chinese vessel to a Sri Lankan port built with money from Beijing.</p> <p>Shipping data from Refinitiv Eikon showed research and survey vessel Yuan Wang 5 was en route to the southern Sri Lankan port of Hambantota and was expected to arrive on Aug. 11.</p> <p>"The government carefully monitors any developments having a bearing on India's security and economic interests, and takes all necessary measures to safeguard them," India's foreign ministry spokesperson Arindam Bagchi told a weekly media briefing.</p> <p>"I think that should be a clear message."</p> <p>He did not say what measures India was taking and who the message was addressed to.</p> <p>China's foreign ministry did not immediately respond to a request for comment. Sri Lankan officials could not immediately be reached for comment.</p> <p>A Sri Lankan government official told Reuters on condition of anonymity that Indian diplomats in Colombo had lodged a verbal protest with the Sri Lankan foreign ministry on Monday.</p> <p>'SPACE TRACKING' A Sri Lankan consulting firm, the Belt & Road Initiative Sri Lanka, says on its website that Yuan Wang 5 would be in Hambantota for a week.</p> <p>"The vessel will conduct space tracking, satellite control and research tracking in the north-western part of the Indian Ocean region through August and September," it says, without citing a source.</p> <p>Sri Lanka formally handed over commercial activities in its main southern port to a Chinese company in 2017 on a 99-year lease after struggling to repay its debt. The port is near the main shipping route from Asia to Europe.</p>

	<p>U.S. and Indian officials have been concerned that the \$1.5 billion port could become a Chinese military base.</p> <p>A Sri Lankan official told Reuters on Monday Beijing was welcome to pour more money into vast China-backed projects in Hambantota and Colombo. read more</p> <p>China is one of Sri Lanka's biggest lenders and has also funded airports, roads and railways, unsettling India.</p> <p>As Sri Lanka now battles its worst economic crisis in seven decades, India this year alone has provided it support of nearly \$4 billion.</p> <p>Responding to a tweet on the proposed Hambantota visit, Indian security analyst Nitin A. Gokhale invoked Sri Lanka's decision to allow a Chinese submarine and a warship to dock in Colombo in 2014, a move that angered India at the time.</p> <p>"2014 redux?," Gokhale said on Twitter. "Harmless port call or deliberate provocation?"</p> <p>India's concerns over Chinese influence in Sri Lanka come as U.S. President Joe Biden and China's Xi Jinping held their fifth call as leaders on Thursday amid tensions over a possible visit to Chinese-claimed Taiwan by U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi.</p> <p>Also on Thursday, Taiwan's military fired flares to warn away a drone that "glanced by" a strategically-located and heavily fortified island close to the Chinese coast that was possibly probing its defences, the Taiwanese Defence Ministry said.</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	07/28 Staff shortages choking health care system
SOURCE	https://www.usnews.com/news/health-news/articles/2022-07-28/staff-shortages-choking-u-s-health-care-system
GIST	<p>As the pandemic stretches on with no clear end in sight, one of the biggest unanswered questions is what this experience has meant, and ultimately will mean, for those who've been on the front lines throughout – the nation's health care workforce – and the patients they serve.</p> <p>An estimated 1.5 million health care jobs were lost in the first two months of COVID-19 as the country raced to curb the novel coronavirus by temporarily closing clinics and restricting non-emergency services at U.S. hospitals. Though many of those jobs have since returned, health care employment remains below pre-pandemic levels, with the number of workers down by 1.1%, or 176,000, compared to February 2020, per the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.</p> <p>Yet the need for health care workers has never been greater. Staffing shortages are now the nation's top patient safety concern, forcing Americans to endure longer wait times when seeking care "even in life-threatening emergencies," or to be turned away entirely, according to ECRI, a nonprofit patient safety organization.</p> <p>In a letter sent in March to the House Energy and Commerce Committee, the American Hospital Association called the workforce shortage hospitals were experiencing a "national emergency," projecting the overall shortage of nurses to reach 1.1 million by the end of the year. And it's not just nurses: Professionals from medical lab workers to paramedics are in short supply.</p> <p>The effects are being felt throughout the entire care continuum. In certain parts of the country, whole hospitals and medical departments have shuttered amid such shortfalls, leaving patients with less access to vital health care, including labor and delivery services and inpatient care for children.</p>

With fewer clinicians working in the field, practitioners are finding themselves responsible for a larger number of patients, fueling soaring [burnout](#) levels that experts say raise the risk of medical errors and, consequently, potential harm to Americans. The number of central line-associated bloodstream infections increased 28% in the second quarter of 2020 compared to the same period in 2019, according to the [New England Journal of Medicine](#), while rates of falls rose by 17% and pressure injuries increased by nearly 42% at skilled nursing facilities during the same period.

And the strain hasn't let up. A February 2022 survey conducted by [USA Today and Ipsos](#) of more than 1,100 health care workers found nearly a quarter of respondents said they were likely to leave the field in the near future due to the pandemic.

Low morale has already translated into departures. Results of a September 2021 poll of 1,000 health care workers revealed that, since February 2020, 18% had quit their jobs.

Patients are feeling the sting in several ways. In January 2022, Saint Alphonsus Health System – a primary care provider for a region with a population of more than 1 million in Idaho and parts of Oregon – decided to temporarily close weekend operations at three of its urgent care centers and cut back hours at all 11 of its urgent care clinics for a couple of weeks when several staff members contracted COVID-19 and had to isolate. Though the situation has since normalized there, sudden, temporary staff losses have become par for the course during a pandemic that has sickened workers across all corners of the health care landscape.

Other staff cutbacks have been more permanent. In April 2022, Memorial Hospital of Carbon County, in Rawlins, Wyoming, announced it was ending its labor and delivery services due to staffing challenges. Now, the closest facility for expectant parents is about an hour and a half away at Iverson Memorial Hospital, in Laramie, Wyoming.

“The cost of traveling nurses has played a significant role” in the decision, said Rod Waeckerlin, chair of the MHCC Board of Trustees, in a press release. “Labor and Delivery is a unique service line that requires intensive staffing. Unfortunately, as a result of the pandemic, MHCC has lost a number of nursing staff, forcing a reliance on traveling nurses and creating a financial imbalance operationally.”

The escalating demand for health care professionals has also led to a sharp rise in labor costs, as hospitals vying for workers must dangle larger pay packages. Hospital labor costs rose 37% between 2019 and March 2022, according to a recent report from consulting firm [Kaufman Hall](#).

Evolving challenges

For hospital systems like Northwell Health in New York, the fluctuating labor market has presented both immediate and longer-term workforce challenges that have evolved as the nature of the pandemic has changed.

By the start of 2021, Northwell's staffing focus shifted. It went from managing the influx of severely ill COVID-19 patients flooding its emergency departments and inpatient beds to adding personnel at its outpatient settings to treat more moderate cases.

With COVID cases ticking up once again at press time, Matthew Kurth, deputy chief people officer for Northwell Health, says the health system has pivoted to ensuring testing centers and processing laboratories are staffed up enough to meet the demand.

But just as workers have adapted, many patients are changing how they access their health care due to the pandemic, which has created both opportunities and new challenges.

For example, many patients have become accustomed to using digital tools like telehealth to tend to their primary care needs, a practice Kurth says will likely continue beyond the pandemic. But while fewer people are being hospitalized for severe COVID-19, more patients are showing up with severe ailments, creating a backlog of cases at myriad facilities nationwide. Many of these cases stem from delayed care –

people having postponed treatment either due to contagion fears or care restrictions enacted at the height of the pandemic.

“I think that first wave definitely had an impact across the entire spectrum,” says Dr. John D’Angelo, chief of integrated operations for Northwell Health.

A heavy burden

Although hospital staffing challenges have changed with each new COVID wave, one concern has remained constant: the mental and physical burden that has been placed on health care workers.

At Henry Ford Health in Michigan, pandemic-related burnout and stress has led some professionals to leave in pursuit of more lucrative jobs contracting with staffing agencies while others have opted to exit the field altogether, says Jan Harrington-Davis, the organization’s vice president of talent acquisition and workforce diversity. She estimates the health system has approximately 3,000 open positions.

“I don’t think there’s any area that you could name that hasn’t seen a huge amount of turnover,” Harrington-Davis says.

Michelle Gaskill-Hames, chief operating officer for Kaiser Permanente’s Southern California and Hawaii markets, says though the situation has improved since the early months of COVID-19 in terms of cases and deaths, there remains a vital need for hospitals to address the anguish workers have experienced since Day One.

“As our surges are becoming smaller, more people are vaccinated and hospitalizations are down, many people are looking to put the pandemic behind them, but in the health care space, it’s not that easy,” Gaskill-Hames says. “There are just layers of anxiety, stress and fear. That doesn’t just go away.”

To help workers recover from pandemic-induced trauma, the health system launched Rise & Renew, an initiative that provides employees with counseling support.

At Mount Sinai Health System in New York, staff have been offered 14 one-on-one behavioral health counseling sessions and group workshops at no charge since June 2020, when the organization launched its [Center for Stress, Resilience, and Personal Growth](#).

According to Jane Maksoud, the health system’s chief human resources officer, this program, coupled with efforts to allow as many as 10,000 team members to work remotely, is part of a broader retention strategy that hinges on meeting workers where they are to engage them with support, and allowing flexibility to whatever extent possible.

However, even as the country enters a less acute phase of the pandemic, some experts are skeptical that enough is being done nationwide to combat the enduring trauma of having worked on the front lines throughout COVID-19.

“My concern is that even though it’s getting talked about a lot, I don’t know if the support is reaching the clinical staff,” says Dr. Rajnish Jaiswal, associate chief of emergency medicine at NYC Health + Hospitals-Metropolitan in Manhattan. “Wellness programs that keep that in mind and allow folks to actually utilize them – I think that’s going to be the next big step.”

Jaiswal says getting back to a state of “normal” for many hospitals will also mean facing the same staffing problems that were present before COVID-19.

A coordinated response

Creative staffing solutions have also emerged from the pandemic. In the thick of initial COVID-19 surges, some hospitals addressed workforce gaps through rapid redeployment of existing staff to help in areas of high need. Medical specialists whose services were put on hold to stem the spread of the virus began

pitching in to assist colleagues in caring for COVID-19 patients. Groups of nurses and physicians led by intensive care unit clinicians were formed to manage sicker patients.

“In some instances, we had physicians working for nurses because a lot of the burden was on the nursing teams to really deliver that consistent bedside care,” Maksoud says.

Similar tactics are being adopted at Saint Alphonsus, for example. To address its nursing shortage and ideally reduce wait times, the medical center is launching a pilot program that creates nursing care teams made up of registered nurses, licensed practical nurses and certified nursing assistants. With fewer nurses available to care for patients in that region, the goal of the program is to have fewer RNs be in charge of a larger pool of patients than they would traditionally without lowering care quality or safety standards.

“It’s kind of a way to spread that care team a little broader,” says David McFadyen, president of Saint Alphonsus Regional Medical Center.

At Virginia Mason Franciscan Health in Washington State, virtual care is proving helpful. Chief Nursing Officer Dianne Aroh says a centralized mission control center and virtual hospital that went into effect in 2019 provides real-time, systemwide surveillance that has helped deploy personnel more rapidly to departments experiencing capacity issues, while easing patient-flow bottlenecks and wait times.

“That’s a system I think that we will need to leverage in the future,” she says.

The road ahead

Whether due to labor costs, illness or burnout, the long-term ramifications of current health care workforce shortages are likely to be felt well after the pandemic ends.

Nationally, staffing shortages threaten to exacerbate what projections for years have characterized as a looming crisis. By 2025, the U.S. is estimated to have a shortage of approximately 446,000 home health aides, 95,000 nursing assistants, 98,700 medical and lab technologists and technicians, and more than 29,000 nurse practitioners, according to a 2021 report conducted by industry market analytic firm [Mercer](#).

Meanwhile, the need for health care is only going to rise as the elderly population grows. The number of individuals ages 65 and older is projected to increase from 54 million in 2019 to more than 80 million by 2040, according to the [Department of Health and Human Services](#). The prevalence of chronic illnesses among younger people and children has also grown over time, with more than [40% of school-age children and adolescents](#) having at least one chronic health condition.

While technology and workforce innovations may provide short-term relief, a diminished workforce signals a future where patients will likely have to become more active participants in their health care to achieve good outcomes.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	07/29 Day 156 of the Russia invasion
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jul/29/russia-ukraine-war-latest-what-we-know-on-day-156-of-the-invasion
GIST	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ukraine has stepped up its campaign to retake Russian-controlled regions in the south by trying to bomb and isolate Russian troops in hard-to-resupply areas. Ukrainian planes struck five Russian strongholds around Kherson and another nearby city on Thursday, its military claimed. Kyiv said it had also retaken some small settlements on the Kherson region’s northern edge.• The Ukrainian counteroffensive in the country’s south is “gathering momentum”, according to British defence and intelligence officials. Ukraine has virtually cut off the Russian-occupied southern city of Kherson, leaving thousands of Russian troops stationed near the Dnieper River “highly vulnerable” and isolated, the UK ministry of defence said.• Residents of Russian-occupied areas in Ukraine’s eastern Donbas region have been urged to evacuate. Ukraine’s deputy prime minister, Iryna Vereshchuk, said people risked being cut off

	<p>from “power, water, food and medical supplies, heating and communication” if they stayed in the area.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Five people were killed and at least 25 injured when Russian missiles struck the hangars of an aviation enterprise in Kropyvnytskyi, north of Mykolaiv, on Thursday. • At least two people were killed in the Donetsk town of Toretsk on Thursday, when a five-storey building collapsed after a Russian missile strike. • Two people in the southern seaside town of Koblevo were blown up by a sea mine while swimming despite a ban, said the Mykolaiv regional governor, Vitaliy Kim. • US lawmakers were briefed by US officials who said more than 75,000 Russians were estimated to have been killed or injured in the war. The number was “enormous”, Elissa Slotkin, a Democratic House representative who previously attended a secret US government briefing, told CNN. However, there was no current information from official authorities in Russia on the number of deaths. • The UN aid chief said he was hopeful the first shipment of grain from a Ukrainian Black Sea port could take place as early as Friday. Martin Griffiths said “crucial” details for the safe passage of vessels were still being worked out and “the devil was in the details”. • Talks between the Kremlin and Washington about a possible prisoner swap were said to not have come to a concrete agreement “yet” on Thursday. The deal reportedly involves trading a notorious Russian arms dealer for a US basketball star and a former marine. • Estonia said on Thursday it would block Russian nationals from obtaining temporary residence permits or visas to study in Estonia, in a move its foreign minister described as putting “relentless pressure” on Russia and its population. • Hungary’s prime minister said Ukraine could not win the war against Russia under Nato’s current support strategy. “This war in this form cannot be won,” Viktor Orbán said. “Without changing the strategy, there is not going to be peace.” • Former Russian state TV journalist Marina Ovsyannikova was fined 50,000 roubles (\$820 or £681) after being found guilty of discrediting the country’s armed forces in social media posts condemning Russia’s actions in Ukraine. Ovsyannikova rejected the proceedings against her as “absurd”. • Russia’s media regulator, Roskomnadzor, has filed a lawsuit to revoke the registration of the independent Novaya Gazeta newspaper, which had previously announced it would resume operations in Russia after the war had ended. • The UK foreign minister, Liz Truss, said she would be Ukraine’s “greatest friend” if she replaced the British prime minister, Boris Johnson. Truss said she would work with allies to provide more weapons and humanitarian aid in a commitment to “ensuring Putin fails in Ukraine and suffers a strategic defeat, and that Russia is constrained in the future”. • German cities are imposing cold showers and turning off lights to reduce their energy consumption in the face of a looming Russian gas crisis. Hanover announced energy-saving measures including turning off hot water in the showers and bathrooms of city-run buildings and leisure centres. Other cities are switching off spotlights on public monuments and turning off fountains.
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	07/28 Torrid heatwave Pacific Northwest
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/jul/28/us-pacific-north-west-may-see-triple-digit-temperatures-as-heatwave-continues
GIST	<p>Triple-digit heat was being investigated on Thursday as the cause of death for four people as a sweltering heatwave enveloped the US Pacific north-west and the forecast showed no sign of letting up soon in a region unaccustomed to such temperatures.</p> <p>The Oregon State Medical Examiner’s Office said hyperthermia was suspected in the deaths this week of at least three people in Multnomah county, which is home to Portland. A fourth death in eastern Oregon’s Umatilla county may also have been caused by heat, the agency said Thursday in an email.</p>

The deaths occurred on Monday, Wednesday and Thursday. The state medical examiner's office said the heat-related death designation is preliminary and could change after further investigation. Such investigations could take months, it said.

The state has roasted since Monday and temperatures at or near triple digits were forecast into the weekend. Portland could be on track to break a record for the duration of the hot spell, authorities said, as local governments and non-profits scrambled to expand capacity at cooling centers.

"For the next several days through Saturday we're going to be within a few degrees of 100F every day," said Colby Neuman, a meteorologist for the National Weather Service (NWS) in Portland, Oregon.

Temperatures in Oregon's largest city were forecast to soar to 101F (38.3C) again on Friday. On Tuesday, Portland set a daily record of 102F (38.9C). Seattle also reported a new record daily high of 94F (34.4C). The heat spell was forecast to last into Saturday in western Washington as well.

The NWS extended heat warnings from Thursday through Saturday evening.

The duration of the heatwave puts Portland "in the running" for tying its longest streak of six consecutive days of 95F (35C) or higher, Neuman said.

Climate change is fueling longer heatwaves in the Pacific north-west, a region where weeklong heat spells were historically rare, according to climate experts.

Heat-related 911 calls in Portland have tripled from an estimated eight calls on Sunday to 28 on Tuesday, said Dan Douthit, a spokesperson for the bureau of emergency management. Most calls involved a medical response, Douthit said.

Multnomah county said more people have been visiting emergency departments for heat-related symptoms. In a statement, the county said: "In the past three days, hospitals have treated 13 people for heat illness, when they would normally expect to see two or three."

People working or exercising outside and older people were among those taken to emergency departments, the statement said.

Many food trucks have shut down. Rico Loverde, chef and owner of Monster Smash Burgers, said the temperature inside his cart was generally 20F hotter than the outdoor temperature, making it 120F (48.9C) this week.

Loverde said he closes down if it reaches above 95F (35C) because his refrigerators overheat and shut down. Last week, even with temperatures in the mid-90s, Loverde got heatstroke from working in his cart for hours, he said.

"It definitely hurts. I still pay my employees when we're closed like this because they have to pay the bills too, but for a small business it's not good," he said.

Multnomah county expanded capacity at four cooling centers, to accommodate nearly 300 people.

William Nonluecha, who lives in a tent in Portland, sought out shade with friends as the temperature soared on Wednesday. Nonluecha was less than a minute's walk from a cooling shelter set up by local authorities but was not aware it was open. He said his tent was almost unbearable.

His friend Mel Taylor, who was homeless last year but now has transitional housing, said last summer a man in a tent near his died from heat exhaustion and no one realized.

"He was in his tent for like a week and the smell, that's how they figured out that he was dead," Taylor said. "It's sad."

	<p>Residents and officials have been trying to adjust to the likely reality of longer, hotter heatwaves after last summer's "heat dome" that prompted record temperatures.</p> <p>About 800 people died in Oregon, Washington and British Columbia in late June and early July. The temperature reached an all-time high of 116F (46.7C) in Portland and smashed records across the region. Many of those who died were older and lived alone.</p> <p>Other regions of the US often experience temperatures of 100F. But in regions like the Pacific north-west, people are not as acclimated to the heat and are more susceptible to it, said Craig Crandall, a professor of internal medicine at the University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center.</p> <p>"There's a much greater risk for individuals ... to have higher instances of heat-related injuries and death," Crandall said.</p> <p>Officials in Seattle and Portland on Tuesday issued air quality advisories expected to last through Saturday, warning that smog may reach levels that could be unhealthy for sensitive groups.</p> <p>The NWS also issued a heat advisory for western Nevada and north-east California to last from the late Thursday morning until Saturday night. Across the region, near record daytime high temperatures will range from 99F to 104F (37.2C to 40C).</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	07/28 China's Xi warns Biden over Taiwan
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/biden-chinas-xi-talk-as-a-pelosi-trip-to-taiwan-threatens-to-inject-new-tensions-11659013042?mod=hp_lead_pos6
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON—Chinese leader Xi Jinping warned President Biden about relations with Taiwan, as a possible trip to the island by House Speaker Nancy Pelosi adds tensions to strained U.S.-China relations.</p> <p>In a more than two-hour phone call Thursday, the leaders ranged over an array of friction-filled issues, from Russia's military assault on Ukraine and other world hot spots to the global economy, according to accounts of the meeting issued by the Chinese Embassy in Washington and a senior Biden administration official.</p> <p>That Chinese statement described the exchange as candid and said both leaders called for cooperation. The White House said the meeting aimed to keep communication channels open, "manage our differences and work together where our interests align."</p> <p>On Taiwan, however, Mr. Xi urged the U.S. to tread cautiously in its ties there and heed Beijing's interests over what it sees as a matter of sovereignty. "Those who play with fire will perish by it. It is hoped that the U.S. will be clear-eyed about this," the Chinese statement quoted Mr. Xi as telling Mr. Biden.</p> <p>The White House declined to specifically comment on that remark, though the senior official said Mr. Xi has used similar rhetoric in the past.</p> <p>Mr. Biden told Mr. Xi that U.S. policy remains unchanged and included an indirect admonition to Beijing about its military and economic pressure against Taiwan. "The United States strongly opposes unilateral efforts to change the status quo or undermine peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait," a White House statement cited Mr. Biden as saying.</p> <p>Neither the Chinese nor White House statements mentioned Mrs. Pelosi (D., Calif.) by name, and the administration official refused to detail how the potential trip by Mrs. Pelosi was discussed. Chinese officials have warned that her possible visit would cross a red line on U.S. support for the island and result in severe consequences for relations. The White House has signaled its discomfort with Mrs. Pelosi's plans.</p>

The U.S. and China have in recent weeks made tentative efforts to put a floor on what for years has been a severely deteriorating relationship as the two powers sparred over a range of issues—from trade and technology to China’s [more-assertive military posture](#) and the global order.

Messrs. Biden and Xi discussed areas of cooperation such as climate change and efforts to stem the flow of synthetic opioids into the U.S. They also talked about a future in-person meeting, leaving their aides to follow up, the administration official said.

Mr. Biden was expected to continue to push Mr. Xi against aiding Russia, while the two discussed areas of agreement. In recent weeks, Mr. Biden has also considered lifting some Trump-era tariffs, something both Beijing and American businesses want, though the Biden administration is divided on whether such a move would offset expected domestic political fallout.

A Taiwan trip by Mrs. Pelosi would likely set back any nascent rapprochement and set off a new spiral in relations, U.S. officials and international-affairs experts said. The visit, they said, would confirm Chinese suspicions that the U.S. is deepening support for Taiwan, allowing its democratic government to resist Beijing’s claims to the island, and would be seen as an affront to Mr. Xi at [a time of high political stakes](#).

Mr. Xi is all but assured in getting [a norm-breaking third term](#) as Communist Party leader at a political gathering this fall, Chinese-affairs experts said. But, they said, Mr. Xi faces resistance within the party to his authority, and politicking is under way over leadership appointments that could enhance or hem in his power, so he can’t afford to be seen as weak over Taiwan.

“This really is a moment in Chinese politics,” said Bonnie Glaser, director of the Asia program with the German Marshall Fund of the United States in Washington. “Xi Jinping could be criticized if he does not respond forcefully to a challenge to Chinese sovereignty,” she said.

A demonstration of China’s resolve is likely to come from the Chinese military, said Ms. Glaser. Possible scenarios, she said, include Chinese air force planes [intruding into Taiwan’s territorial airspace](#)—a provocation Beijing has refrained from previously—or trying to interfere with the flight path of the U.S. military aircraft on which Mrs. Pelosi is expected to travel.

Chinese officials publicly and privately have warned vehemently of a sharp—if unspecified—response should the visit proceed.

“The tensions between China and the U.S. have significantly increased the risk of a mistake that could lead to a wider conflagration,” said Wang Huiyao, president of the Center for China and Globalization, a Beijing think tank. Mr. Wang said Thursday’s meeting gives Messrs. Xi and Biden an opportunity to set some bottom lines on Taiwan and other sensitive issues. “It lays the foundation for continued de-escalation of the situation,” he said.

The Ukraine war has further complicated U.S.-China relations, and Messrs. Biden and Xi spent a portion of the time discussing what the Chinese statement called the Ukraine crisis. Mr. Xi has forged a close partnership with Russian President [Vladimir Putin](#) in [a combined effort to diminish U.S. power](#) around the world. While U.S. officials have said that sanctions appear to be preventing China from providing substantial assistance to the Russian war effort, Mr. Xi hasn’t parted ways with Mr. Putin.

The leaders aired their views on the war and its global impact, the administration official said, but “I would not characterize any particular breakthroughs.” Mr. Xi gave his principled position, the Chinese statement said without elaborating. His government has called for peace while also accusing the U.S. of causing the war by backing the expansion of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and ignoring Russia’s security.

Mr. Biden raised concerns about Americans who have been wrongly detained in China or banned from leaving the country, the official said, as well as human rights, such as forced labor.

He also discussed U.S. displeasure with China's economic practices, though trade tariffs were not a specific topic, the administration official said.

Thursday's virtual meeting was weeks in the planning and was the two leaders' fifth since Mr. Biden took office. Their last conversation, in March, was dominated by the Ukraine war, with questions about Beijing's partnership with Moscow. Officials on both sides see such meetings as an effective, potentially stabilizing channel, given that Messrs. Biden and Xi have known each other for more than a decade since they both served as vice presidents.

For Beijing, a trip by a politician as senior as Mrs. Pelosi is seen as part of a perilous backtracking by the U.S. on commitments limiting its relations with Taiwan. The Biden administration, in turn, has said it [is abiding by those previous agreements](#), as well as a U.S. law requiring it to provide weapons for Taiwan's defense. Mr. Biden was expected to reiterate those pledges in his talk with Mr. Xi, said John Kirby, a White House spokesman.

Mrs. Pelosi hasn't confirmed that she will make the trip. Some members of Congress and China hawks in the security establishment have urged Mrs. Pelosi to go, saying it is necessary to show support for Taiwan and not allow Beijing to set terms on U.S. relations with the self-ruled island. While Mr. Biden hasn't publicly said whether Mrs. Pelosi should make the trip, he last week said the U.S. military didn't think it was a good idea.

"The speaker of the House makes her own decisions about travel," Mr. Kirby told reporters Wednesday. "We provide facts, context, analysis, geopolitical realities that she'll be facing wherever she goes. Our job is to inform her decision-making process, and we're doing that," he said.

Aside from members of Congress, former Trump administration officials have made a spate of recent visits, including Mark Esper, who served as defense secretary, and former Secretary of State Mike Pompeo. Ms. Glaser, of the German Marshall Fund, said that raises alarms in Beijing should a Republican administration come to power in the next U.S. election.

Proposals are also working their way through Congress that would elevate political and defense ties with Taiwan. Of particular concern to Beijing, U.S. officials said, is a proposed Senate bill that would require the U.S. to provide armaments capable of deterring an attack by China, rather than the current stipulation of "arms of a defensive character."

The bill, known as the Taiwan Policy Act and sponsored by Sen. Bob Menendez (D., N.J.), the chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, would also make Taiwan eligible for billions of dollars in U.S. grants for weapons purchases and training, a privilege afforded to Israel and other close U.S. allies.

Over the past month, China has taken a more constructive tone in meetings between senior officials, though Chinese officials still lobbed barbs at U.S. policy, U.S. officials said. In a six-hour discussion in Bali this month, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi gave Secretary of State Antony Blinken a list of prospective areas of cooperation, including global health, North Korea and arms control, the U.S. officials said.

U.S. officials are unsure why Chinese officials have appeared to be more constructive in meetings after more than a year of bitter encounters. In part, some of the officials said, Mr. Xi might be seeking to calm relations as a political tactic to show detractors in Beijing that he can manage relations with the U.S., a still important market and investor for China.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	07/28 Jobless claims hold near highest level year
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/jobless-claims-hold-near-highest-level-of-the-year-11659013014?mod=hp_major_pos3#cxrecs_s

GIST

New applications for unemployment benefits held near the highest level of the year last week, a sign that the tight labor market is loosening.

Initial jobless claims, a proxy for layoffs, fell 5,000 [to a seasonally adjusted 256,000](#) in the week ended July 23 from the prior week's upwardly revised level, the Labor Department said Thursday. The prior week's reading was revised up by 10,000 and was [the highest level of claims](#) since November.

Last week's claims stood above the 2019 prepandemic weekly average of 218,000, but remained at a level generally consistent with a solid labor market. The four-week moving average for claims, which smooths weekly volatility, inched up to 249,250 last week, an increase of 6,250 from the previous week's revised average.

The labor market [has been a source of strength](#) this year for the economy, with the unemployment rate in June holding near a half-century low. That stands in contrast to slowing pace of economic output and [inflation trending at four-decade high](#).

Still, recent indicators show conflicting views of the labor market, said Nela Richardson, chief economist at payroll-processing firm ADP. Historically high job postings and solid hiring in recent months indicate a tight labor market, but the share of adults working or looking for work remains below its prepandemic level and the supply of workers shrunk slightly this spring.

"It's not yet finding a balanced position post-pandemic," said Dr. Richardson, who holds a Ph.D. in economics. The labor market is still evolving in the wake of the pandemic recession, she said.

Federal Reserve Chairman Jerome Powell said he [expects the tight labor market to cool](#) as the Fed tries to tamp down high inflation with another interest-rate increase. The Fed [raised interest rates](#) 0.75 percentage point again on Wednesday.

"We actually think we need a period of growth below potential in order to create some slack," he said. "We also think that there will be, in all likelihood, some softening in labor-market conditions."

Thursday's report showed continuing claims, a proxy for the total number of people receiving payments from state unemployment programs, fell 25,000 to 1.36 million in the week ended July 16 from the previous week's level. Continuing claims are reported with a one-week lag.

Bolton Valley Resort has struggled to hire employees, particularly in its food and beverage department and for carpentry and maintenance positions, said Lindsay DesLauriers, chief executive of the Vermont outdoor recreation destination.

Due to staffing constraints, the resort pulled back hours for its main restaurant and filled in the gaps with a restaurant serving flatbread pizzas, which requires fewer workers to operate. The group sales department has also had to be careful about how much they are booking because of the resort's limited staffing capacity, Ms. DesLauriers said.

"It just puts enormous pressure on the staff that is here, to work extra hours, to step up where there's a gap in leadership," Ms. DesLauriers said. "It can be confusing and it can be challenging and it can burn people out."

This summer, the resort began offering employees free on-site child care, as prices for child care have risen, Ms. DesLauriers said. "We think [that] has made a difference for some of our employees in the decision to stay here," she said.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE 07/28 Encampment sweep, no one accepted help

SOURCE <https://mynorthwest.com/3578605/encampment-sweep-eastlake-no-residents-accepted-shelter-referrals/>

GIST	<p>An RV encampment was cleared this morning at Fairview Ave and Newton St., near Terry Pettus Park, in and none of the 12 identified residents accepted offers of relocation into a shelter.</p> <p>The city’s Homelessness Outreach and Provider Ecosystem (HOPE) team had previously identified 12 residents at the site and has been engaged since July 7 with offering shelter and services up until the time of the sweep.</p> <p>As of July 26, city data has shown that none of the residents have accepted any of the shelter offers.</p> <p>Signs were posted warning of the removal, with “no parking” signs placed up and around the site and Seattle Department of Transit reaching out to occupants to notify about the sweep.</p> <p>For its shelters, the city partners with the King County Regional Homelessness Authority on homelessness outreach and referrals to shelters, as well as many other non-profit outreach providers.</p> <p>Speaking to a representative from the city about why the RV camp was removed, it was explained when the city does these removals regularly, a series of factors are considered, including local crime, total shots fired, fires, and other safety data to “ensure a comprehensive review and objective prioritization criteria.”</p> <p>Any personal items removed from the site are stored per city policy. People can retrieve their items by calling the city, and a pickup or delivery will be arranged.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	07/28 Sanctions crippling Russia’s economy
SOURCE	https://www.homelandsecuritynewswire.com/dr20220728-sanctions-are-crippling-russias-economy-study
GIST	<p>Sanctions on Russia are taking a heavy toll on the economy, despite Moscow’s assertion that the country is not feeling the pinch, according to a new study from Yale University.</p> <p>The authors claim their work casts doubt on Moscow’s claims that the economy remains robust and that the West is suffering more through “a war of economic attrition.”</p> <p>What Does the Study Say?</p> <p>Yale’s team of experts used consumer data and figures from Russia’s international trade and shipping partners to measure economic activity five months after Moscow launched its invasion of Ukraine.</p> <p>They found that Russia’s position as a commodities exporter had been irreversibly eroded, having been forced to switch from its main markets in Europe toward Asia.</p> <p>The study said Russian imports have largely collapsed since the war began, and that the country is facing stark challenges securing crucial inputs, parts, and technology.</p> <p>“Russian domestic production has come to a complete standstill with no capacity to replace lost businesses, products and talent,” the team found.</p> <p>“The hollowing out of Russia’s domestic innovation and production base has led to soaring prices and consumer angst,” the authors added.</p> <p>With the exodus of some 1,000 global companies, Russia has lost companies that represent some 40% of gross domestic product, according to the study.</p> <p>The report said Putin was resorting to patently unsustainable, dramatic fiscal and monetary intervention to smooth over structural economic weaknesses.</p> <p>It added that the Russian government budget had gone into deficit for the first time, and the Kremlin’s finances are “in much, much more dire straits than conventionally understood.”</p>

Meanwhile, the authors said Russian financial markets — with an eye on future outlook — were the worst performing in the world, limiting capacity to tap new investment to revitalize the economy.

‘Cherry-Picked’ Statistics

“Since the invasion, the Kremlin’s economic releases have become increasingly cherry-picked, selectively tossing out unfavorable metrics while releasing only those that are more favorable,” the study said.

“These Putin-selected statistics are then carelessly trumpeted across media and used by reams of well-meaning but careless experts in building out forecasts which are excessively, unrealistically favorable to the Kremlin.”

New figures for Russian industrial production for June show that it was significantly depressed across a range of sectors compared with last year.

For cars, production was down by 89%, while for fiber optic cables it dropped by almost 80%.

What’s Next for Russian Economy?

The authors of the Yale study said that Russia had no path out of “economic oblivion,” provided that [Western allies stay unified on sanctions](#).

“Defeatist headlines arguing that Russia’s economy has bounced back are simply not factual — the facts are that, by any metric and on any level, the Russian economy is reeling, and now is not the time to step on the brakes,” it said.

A separate study by the German Institute for International and Security Affairs published in June also suggested that the Russian economy was in dire straits, despite having held up well initially in the face of sanctions.

“The sanctions’ effects are only just beginning to unfold: Supply-chain problems are intensifying and demand is falling quickly.”

“In the longer run, Russia’s economy will become more primitive as it partially decouples from international trade,” it said.

“To avoid social tensions, the government will intervene to support Russian businesses, leading to more protectionism and a larger state footprint in the economy.”

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	07/28 Wildfire: 70+ large fires, 3M acres, 12 states
SOURCE	https://www.hstoday.us/subject-matter-areas/emergency-preparedness/wildfire-update-70-plus-large-fires-burn-3-million-acres-across-12-states/
GIST	<p>More than 70 large fires and complexes have burned 3,020,265 acres in 12 states. Two new large fires were reported, one in Idaho and one in Colorado. Four Type 1 incident management teams (IMT), five Type 2 IMTs, and one complex IMT are assigned to incidents in the Southern California, Great Basin, Southern and Alaska areas.</p> <p>One RC-26 aircraft with Distributed Real-Time Infrared (DRTI) capability and support personnel from the 141st Air Refueling Wing (Washington Air National Guard) have been deployed to Boise, ID. One RC-26 aircraft with Distributed Real-Time Infrared (DRTI) capability and support personnel from the 162nd Operations Group (Arizona Air National Guard) have been deployed to St. George, UT in support of wildland fire operations.</p>

	<p>Prolonged and near-record temperatures and extremely dry fuels continue to increase the potential for wildfires. For more information, visit the Predictive Services fuels and fire danger summary, fire weather and potential briefing, and the seven-day significant fire potential outlook.</p> <p>Lightning ignited more than 3,200 wildfires this year, but nearly 35,000 were human-caused. Some people walk away without putting out their campfire, others light fireworks around day brush and grass. These behaviors are dangerous and unlawful. You can make a difference and reduce unwanted wildland fires by reporting careless and illegal behavior. If you see something suspicious, please call the nearest law enforcement office and help protect out wildlands. Please do your part to prevent wildfires and recreate responsibly.</p> <p>Weather</p> <p>Exceptionally hot, dry conditions are expected from northern California, across the Pacific Northwest and into the Northern Rockies and across the northern Great Basin. A mix of wet and dry scattered thunderstorms is likely to develop in the central Idaho mountains, into southwestern Montana, southeastern Idaho and western Wyoming. Gusty outflow winds are expected in the vicinity of thunderstorms. Monsoonal moisture will continue to generate widespread thunderstorm activity across the Southwest and Colorado Rockies, with a chance of heavy rain in the Front Range and into southeastern Colorado. Scattered thunderstorms are likely to extend into portions of southern California, the Great Basin and the Sierra Nevada. Isolated thunderstorms are also possible in southern and into central Oregon. Conditions will remain hot, dry and breezy across most of Texas and the Lower Mississippi Valley today. The thunderstorms that have been persistent across the central Great plains into the Ohio Valley may slide south to produce some precipitation in Oklahoma, the Texas Panhandle and Arkansas, as well as continuing to produce storms and possibly heavy rain in the Ohio Valley.</p>
Return to Top	Read more at the National Interagency Fire Center

HEADLINE	07/28 Is there an official definition of recession?
SOURCE	https://www.krem.com/article/news/verify/money-verify/what-is-a-recession-official-definition/536-47a3cc51-3385-4f43-8fbd-1456c01536df
GIST	<p>The U.S. Commerce Department reported on July 28 that the nation's gross domestic product (GDP) fell at an annual rate of 0.9% in the second quarter, marking two consecutive quarters of decline.</p> <p>GDP generally measures the monetary value of goods and services produced in a country during a given time period, such as a quarter or year.</p> <p>The recent declines have sparked fears that a recession is on the horizon, since many on social media claim a recession is defined by two consecutive quarters of negative GDP growth. But the White House says this isn't accurate, writing "that is neither the official definition nor the way economists evaluate the state of the business cycle."</p> <p>Multiple VERIFY readers have reached out to ask what constitutes a recession and if there is an official definition.</p> <p>THE QUESTION</p> <p>Is there an official definition of a recession?</p> <p>THE SOURCES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER) • U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA) • International Monetary Fund • Corporate Finance Institute • Alan Gin, Ph.D., associate professor of economics at the University of San Diego's Knauss School of Business

THE ANSWER

Yes, there is an official definition of a recession – and it's not two quarters in a row of declining GDP.

WHAT WE FOUND

[A committee](#) within the National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER), a nonprofit research organization that's not affiliated with the federal government, [determines when](#) the U.S. economy has entered into a recession.

A recession is [defined by the NBER](#) as a “significant decline in economic activity spread across the economy, lasting more than a few months.” The organization takes into account many factors, including [GDP](#), [real income](#), employment, [industrial production](#), and [consumer spending](#), in its determination.

Though people often cite two consecutive quarters of GDP decline as the definition of a recession, and [countries like Great Britain use this designation](#), it is not an “official designation” in the U.S., according to [the Bureau of Economic Analysis](#), an independent, federal statistical agency.

The NBER definition is a “better approach” to defining a recession than GDP declines alone, Alan Gin, an economics professor at the University of San Diego, told VERIFY.

“There's some quirks in terms of the GDP that kind of makes it not necessarily a good measure as far as how the economy is going,” he said. “For example, there are two big areas that could be distorting. One is in the area of international trade and the other is in the term of business inventories.”

When it comes to international trade, the number of items imported into the U.S. is a metric that could have both positive and negative implications for the American economy. For example, imports can lead to GDP declines because the U.S. is sending more of its money overseas. However, if the U.S. is importing many goods from other countries, that can actually signal that the economy is growing and people have incomes to buy the imported products, Gin explained.

“During the first quarter of the year, the economy was down, as measured by GDP, -1.6%. But a big part of that was due to a big surge in imports,” he said. “And again, that's more of a sign of strength of the U.S. economy as opposed to a weakness.”

Businesses drawing down from their inventory, or selling existing inventory while not buying more, is also considered negative for GDP, which contributed to declines in the second quarter, according to Gin. But it's unclear right now whether that's a positive or negative signal for the strength of the U.S. economy.

So has the U.S. met the definition of a recession? NBER hasn't declared one and it often takes them a long time to do so. Sometimes, a recession is over by the time the organization declares there was one, according to Gin.

Gin says he doesn't think the U.S. is in a recession right now, though it could happen in the future. But, right now, consumer spending is on the rise, and industrial production and job growth remain strong, which are positive signs for the economy, he said.

[According to the Corporate Finance Institute](#), during a recession, “the demand for goods and services starts declining rapidly and steadily.” Since producers don't notice this drop in demand right away, there is excess supply in the market. All positive economic indicators such as income, output and wages also start to fall as a result.

At the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, the U.S. entered into a brief recession, [according to the NBER](#).

“I think the pandemic was just a once-in-a-lifetime thing that caused disruptions in the economy,” Gin said. “But in the last four years, one area that was disrupted was the labor market. Huge numbers of people

	retired early, some people died or got long COVID as a result of the disease, and therefore are out of the labor market.”
	As for whether the U.S. is currently headed toward meeting the definition of another recession, only time – and not claims on social media – will tell.
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	07/28 Duwamish Tribe excluded from Seattle IAC
SOURCE	https://www.q13fox.com/news/duwamish-tribe-excluded-from-seattles-indigenous-advisory-council
GIST	<p>SEATTLE - Seattle is named after Chief Seattle, chief of the Duwamish Tribe from 1840 to 1866, yet the city's inaugural Indigenous Advisory Council has no representatives from the Duwamish Tribe.</p> <p>In 2021, a city ordinance formed the Indigenous Advisory Council (IAC) with the goal of advising officials on issues affecting American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian people living in Seattle. The council consists of nine members—five appointed by the city council and four appointed by the mayor—and must include elders, youths and delegates of an Indigenous tribe, plus representatives of urban Indian organizations.</p> <p>The Duwamish Tribe says that, despite Seattle owing its namesake to their distinguished chief, they have no place at the table advising on matters that directly affect them.</p> <p>"To deny the Duwamish Tribe any seat at the newly formed Indigenous Advisory Council contradicts its legitimacy and intention to be an inclusive and reparative advisory body," said Duwamish Tribal Chairwoman Cecile Hansen. "This decision is even more astounding because the Duwamish Tribe is the only tribe within the city limits, the city which bears the name and image of our great Chief Seattle."</p> <p>On Thursday, the city council unanimously approved the nine new members of the IAC, who will be advised on city policies and budgets that affect Indigenous people.</p> <p>The Duwamish Tribe hoped to be represented on the IAC by Ken Workman, an enrolled member who is also the fifth-generation grandson of Chief Seattle, himself. Workman allegedly applied to several positions on the council but was not selected.</p> <p>Hansen penned a letter to the city council in June urging them to reconsider, and to include the Duwamish Tribe on the IAC.</p> <p>"The absolute exclusion of the Duwamish Tribe from serving in any position on the inaugural IAC smacks of the City's actions consistent with the 1865 'Law #5' outlawing any 'Duwamish Nation person' from the city limits, which in today's context renders the IAC selection as less than performative efforts at inclusive, reparative justice to address historic harm to the Duwamish Tribe," wrote Hansen.</p> <p>The tribe said they and their supporters, including Real Rent Duwamish, have testified against their exclusion from the council.</p> <p>The Duwamish Tribe is not a federally recognized Indigenous tribe.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	07/28 Big tech resilient as economy cools
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/07/28/business/big-tech-resilient-economy.html
GIST	No boom can last forever, even for the technology industry's most affluent companies. Investors punished the biggest tech companies earlier this year, erasing \$2 trillion in market value over fears the industry would falter in the face of rising inflation and a slowing economy.

But this week, as the United States [reported that economic output](#) fell for the second straight quarter, [Microsoft](#), [Alphabet](#), [Amazon](#) and [Apple](#) posted sales and profits that showed their businesses have the dominance and diversity to defy the economic woes hurting smaller companies.

Microsoft and Amazon proved that their lucrative cloud businesses were continuing to expand even as the economy cools. Alphabet's subsidiary, Google, demonstrated that search advertisements remained in demand among travel companies and retailers. And Apple papered over a downturn in its device business by increasing its sales of apps and subscription services.

Collectively, it was a sign that tech may have already hit a bottom and is beginning to rebound, said Dave Harden, the chief investment officer at Summit Global, a firm near Salt Lake City with about \$2 billion under investment that counts Apple among its holdings.

"These guys are still delivering," Mr. Harden said. "They're acting responsibly and navigating through a choppy period."

The better-than-feared results lifted the companies' share prices and provided a jolt to the stock market, [even as Alphabet](#) and [Microsoft fell short](#) of Wall Street's expectations.

The results made clear that the companies are not immune to problems such as supply-chain disruptions, rising costs and shifts in customer spending. But their giant businesses are not as vulnerable to the various challenges sweeping across the economy as smaller companies like [Twitter](#) and [Snap, the owner of Snapchat](#).

During calls with analysts, the companies' chief executives cautioned investors about the months ahead, using words like "challenges" and "uncertainty." Concerns about the economy are leading some of them, including Alphabet, to slow the pace of hiring and take other precautions, but none have said they plan to begin making layoffs.

Sundar Pichai, Alphabet's chief executive, cast the slowing economy as an opportunity, saying the company would sharpen its focus and "be more disciplined as we go forward." He added, "When you're in growth mode, it's tough to always take the time to do all the readjustments you need to do and moments like this give us a chance."

In what many investors interpreted as a testament to the industry's optimism, Microsoft said it expected double-digit revenue growth for the next year, and Amazon said it expected sales to increase at least 13 percent in the current quarter.

Satya Nadella, the chief executive officer at Microsoft, said the company would invest over the year to take share and build its businesses, while Brian Olsavsky, Amazon's finance chief, said it would have more product in stock and speedier deliveries.

"That's not a recession forecast," said Sean Stannard-Stockton, president of Ensemble Capital, a San Francisco-based investment firm with \$1.3 billion under management. "If we do avoid a severe recession, it's clear that a lot of these businesses will see growth rate pick back up."

Though Apple and Alphabet didn't provide guidance, the companies bought back tens of billions of dollars in stock during the period. Apple's purchase of \$21.7 billion and Alphabet's purchase of \$15.2 billion testified to the companies' belief that their businesses will continue to grow in the years ahead.

[Meta, the company formerly known as Facebook](#), was an outlier among the biggest tech companies, reporting its first decline in quarterly revenue since going public a decade ago. Its woes were an outgrowth of rising competition from TikTok, which has sapped it of users and advertisers, and challenges from privacy changes on iPhones implemented by Apple.

The advertising market is forecast to grow 8.4 percent this year and 6.4 percent in 2023, according to GroupM, a market research firm. Facebook's sales growth last year, when quarterly sales jumped 56 percent, made it "implausible to keep growing," said Brian Wieser, president of business intelligence at GroupM.

Similar challenges have hit the e-commerce market. Convinced that a surge in online orders during the pandemic represented a fundamental change in the way people shopped, Amazon advanced an ambitious plan to open dozens of new warehouses. But as sales have cooled — with the number of items it sold up just 1 percent in the most recent quarter — it has reversed course and decided to close, delay or cancel at least 35 warehouse openings.

Amazon's smaller e-commerce rival, Shopify, said it would [cut about 10 percent of its staff](#). Harley Finkelstein, president of Shopify, said this year would be "a transition year in which e-commerce is largely reset" to the growth levels it recorded before Covid-19.

Apple's biggest obstacle came from its dependency on China to manufacture most of its devices. In April, the company said it would lose about \$4 billion in sales because of factory shutdowns in Shanghai, where it manufactures iPads and Macs. But it still managed to increase its sales of iPhones in the period by 3 percent and set a quarterly record for the number of people who traded Android smartphones for iPhones.

Tim Cook, the chief executive of Apple, said that Apple saw "a cocktail of headwinds," including the supply constraints, the strengthening dollar that increased device prices overseas and the slowing global economy.

"When you think about the number of challenges in the quarter, we feel really good about the growth that we put up," Mr. Cook said. He added that the company would invest through a downturn, but be "deliberate in doing so in recognition of the realities of the environment."

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	07/28 Kentucky flash flooding turns deadly
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/07/28/us/kentucky-flash-flooding.html
GIST	<p>At least eight people died and others were rescued from rooftops on Thursday after heavy rains across southeastern Kentucky touched off what the governor said was "one of the worst, most devastating flooding events" in state history.</p> <p>Gov. Andy Beshear, a Democrat, confirmed in a video on Thursday evening that the death toll had risen to eight from three.</p> <p>"This is an ongoing disaster that continues to put people into danger," Governor Beshear said. "It looks like we will have more rain tonight that may worsen the situation in many places."</p> <p>High waters and strong currents were making it difficult to rescue people, he said. So far, Governor Beshear said, about 30 people have been airlifted to safety.</p> <p>"There are a lot of people out there still in danger that need your prayers," he added.</p> <p>Hours earlier, the governor told state residents to prepare for loss of life as a result of flooding that inundated homes and turned roads and highways into rushing rivers.</p> <p>An 81-year-old woman died as a result of the flooding in Perry County, about 80 miles southeast of Lexington, Governor Beshear said.</p> <p>The governor told Kentucky residents in a Thursday morning news conference that they should brace themselves for more deaths as rescue efforts continued.</p>

“I expect double-digit deaths,” he said. “That’s something that we rarely see.”

It was unclear how the deaths occurred, but Governor Beshear said it was likely that people died in the middle of the night — “maybe even in their sleep.”

Earlier, Governor Beshear also said that “a number of people” were unaccounted for, and others were waiting to be rescued from rooftops. More than 22,000 customers were without power as of Thursday night, and cellphone service was down in some areas, he said.

Governor Beshear [said on Twitter late Thursday](#) that he had asked President Thursday for federal help with recovery efforts. He also established [a state flood relief fund](#) to help those affected by the floods.

Kentucky’s Energy and Environment Cabinet, the agency in charge of protecting the state’s environment, [recommended](#) Thursday night that people evacuate the floodplain of Panbowl Lake in Jackson.

The alert cited as a cause for concern a “muddy discharge” at the Panbowl Lake dam, and it said 110 homes, 13 businesses, two churches, a school and a hospital could find themselves in the path of flooding.

The scenes of flooding in Kentucky came just two days after [record rainfall drenched parts of the St. Louis region](#) with up to a foot of rain that quickly flooded interstates and neighborhoods. Two people died, including one [who was found on Wednesday](#) in a semi-truck that the authorities said had been submerged in floodwaters. About 70 other people were rescued, and more than a dozen homes experienced “significant flooding,” officials said.

While a variety of factors contribute to flooding, researchers expect that, as the climate warms, [flash floods will increase and get “flashier.”](#) meaning their duration will shorten as their magnitude increases. Severe flash floods can be more dangerous and destructive.

“I believe climate change is real,” Governor Beshear, a Democrat, told reporters. “I believe that it is causing more severe weather. With that said, I don’t know about this one and whether it is or is not connected, and I don’t want to cheapen or politicize what these folks are going through.”

Governor Beshear declared a state of emergency in eastern Kentucky. The flooding was a “dynamic and ongoing” situation, he said, adding that the water had yet to recede or even crest in many areas.

“It has been a tough night and maybe even a tougher morning,” he said.

Maj. Gen. Hal Lamberton of the Kentucky National Guard said that state officials had helicopters and boats to rescue residents. Governor Beshear said that two faculty members at a school were among those who had been stranded.

Henry Johnson and his fiancée, Jennifer Richie, spent at least three hours clinging to, and then huddling on top of, their flooded trailer after storm water carried it a short distance from where it had sat in Chavies, Ky. Ms. Richie’s mother was stuck inside, and they initially feared she had drowned.

Mr. Johnson, 32, and Ms. Richie, 41, lost everything in the storm, including their home, cars, shoes and eyeglasses, Diane Johnson, Mr. Johnson’s mother, said. Mrs. Johnson said she received a text at about 12:30 a.m. from her son saying that the flood had come for their property.

Mrs. Johnson said that her son and Ms. Richie ducked underwater and swam out of the trailer as it flooded.

“He said that water was like nothing he’d ever felt before in his life,” Mrs. Johnson said. “It’s not ocean water. It’s not lake water. It’s unreal how strong the current was. And it was dragging him — like a swirling and rocking motion — dragging him everywhere.”

When rescuers arrived, Ms. Richie's mother, Mary Combs, was standing with her head by the trailer's ceiling, in a sliver that had not flooded. The three were taken around 6 a.m. to a hospital. By Thursday afternoon, they were recovering in Mrs. Johnson's home.

Austin Gibson, a state park employee, posted a [video on Twitter](#) on Wednesday night of a small creek that turned into a fast-moving river near his brother's house in Salyersville, about 100 miles southeast of Lexington. He wrote that it was "the worst flooding in my memory."

"The water last night got up underneath his house," Mr. Gibson, 24, said on Thursday in a direct message on Twitter. "Luckily no damage was done to his home. As quickly as it rose, it receded." He added that "everyone has been accounted for in my family."

Brianna Imhoff said she awoke at 5 a.m. to the sound of rushing water; the creek behind her house in Lost Creek, Ky., in Breathitt County, had overflowed.

She and her husband, Austin Imhoff, sought refuge in a neighbor's house across the street, but when that house began to flood, the couple and a woman who was staying there left and walked up a hill. They got the attention of a helicopter crew, which arranged for a boat rescue.

"I'm just so thankful that those rescuers found us," Mrs. Imhoff said. "I really don't know where we would be without them. And that God woke me up, because if we were to stay in that house another two hours, we would be dead."

The house that the couple rented just a month ago was submerged up to the roof, she said, and they lost the car they bought around the same time. Mrs. Imhoff, who found out just two weeks ago that she is pregnant, said that she and her husband were both looking forward to starting nursing school in August. That no longer seems possible.

"Everybody's just lost everything," she said.

After a lull in the rain during the day, scattered showers and thunderstorms, with the potential for heavy rain, were expected on Thursday night, according to the [Weather Service](#).

"This is going to continue into tonight," Governor Beshear said, adding that the brunt of the storms would likely come overnight.

There was moderate risk of excessive rainfall on Thursday for eastern Kentucky, along with the western edge of Virginia and parts of southern West Virginia, [the Weather Prediction Center said](#).

[The Kentucky Mesonet](#), a division of the Kentucky Climate Center at Western Kentucky University, reported that more than three inches of rain had fallen in parts of Breathitt since midnight, and that nearly three inches had fallen in Letcher and Pike Counties.

Governor Beshear said that the emergency declaration would "unlock resources" to help those who had been affected by the flooding. "Massive property damage" was expected, with hundreds likely to lose their homes, he said.

"This is going to be yet another event that it's going to take not months, but likely years for many families to rebuild and recover from," he said. The flooding in Kentucky comes months after devastating swarm of tornadoes in December [killed at least 74 people across the state](#).

"I wish I could tell you why we keep getting hit here in Kentucky," Governor Beshear said. "I wish I could tell you why areas where people may not have that much continue to get hit and lose everything."

[Return to Top](#)

SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/07/28/health/monkeypox-becerra-states.html
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON — With monkeypox cases on the rise and vaccine doses in scarce supply, President Biden’s health secretary suggested on Thursday that states and localities bear some of the responsibility for what critics have called a flawed response.</p> <p>“We don’t control public health in the 50 states, in the territories and in the tribal jurisdictions,” said Xavier Becerra, the secretary of health and human services, in response to a reporter’s question about whether the virus could be eliminated. “We rely on our partnership to work with them. They need to work with us.”</p> <p>Still speaking of the states, he added, “They are ultimately the ones to determine how health care is administered in their jurisdictions.”</p> <p>Mr. Becerra’s comments came as San Francisco, which like New York has one of the highest case rates of monkeypox in the United States, declared its own public health emergency. Officials there said the move would allow the city to get reimbursed by California and the federal government as it works to address its outbreak.</p> <p>In Washington, though, Mr. Becerra said his agency is still weighing whether to declare a national public health emergency. His suggestion that states and localities need to do more seemed to startle state and local officials, who said in interviews that they are generally satisfied with the federal government’s actions, despite the vaccine shortage.</p> <p>“We feel the federal response has been strong and they have been working with us,” said Dr. Marcus Plescia, the chief medical officer for the Association of State and Territorial Health Officials. “There’s just going to be a little bit of a lag between when we find out about these things and when we can really scale up the interventions we’ve got.”</p> <p>The secretary may have been trying to deflect criticism from advocates for people with H.I.V. and AIDS, who face disproportionate risk of contracting monkeypox and have been vocal about their unhappiness with the response.</p> <p>The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported on Thursday that the United States has now confirmed more than 4,600 cases of monkeypox, which has already been declared a global health emergency by the World Health Organization. The U.S. case count is among the highest in the world, and the figure is almost certainly an underestimate. Men who have sex with men comprise 99 percent of the confirmed cases so far.</p> <p>On Wednesday, the Food and Drug Administration announced it had cleared nearly 800,000 additional doses of Jynneos, the monkeypox vaccine. On Friday, the administration will begin allowing states to order doses, using the same ordering system it set up to handle coronavirus vaccines. Mr. Becerra said his agency has also purchased an additional 5.5 million vaccine doses and will have secured more than 6.9 million doses, all told, by May 2023.</p> <p>James Krellenstein, a founder of PrEP4All, an AIDS advocacy group, said that was not fast enough. He faulted the F.D.A. for not moving more quickly to scale up supply and for delaying an inspection of the vaccine maker’s manufacturing plant in Denmark.</p> <p>But Dr. Robert Califf, the F.D.A. commissioner, told reporters Thursday that his agency had moved “much faster than had been planned,” considering that it had to not only inspect the plant but also make sure the vaccine was effective. “The only thing worse than not having a vaccine,” he said, “is having a vaccine which is widely distributed and is not effective.”</p> <p>At the moment, there is not enough vaccine to go around. On Wednesday, Gov. Phil Murphy of New Jersey, a Democrat, wrote a letter to Mr. Becerra and Dr. Rochelle Walensky, the C.D.C. director, complaining that New Jersey had not gotten its fair share. In the letter, obtained by The New York Times,</p>

Mr. Murphy noted New Jersey's proximity to New York, which has more monkeypox cases than any other state.

He said that his calculations showed that because of that proximity and the number of same-sex households in New Jersey, his state would carry 3 percent of the national disease burden, but had been allocated only 2.06 percent of the 131,000 doses that have been available thus far. "Therefore, we do not believe that New Jersey has received an equitable percentage of available vaccine," Mr. Murphy's letter said.

Federal health officials say their allocation strategy depends on two factors: how many cases a state has and how many of its residents are at risk. The formula favors areas with at-risk populations — including men who have sex with men, who have H.I.V. or who are eligible for medication that can reduce a person's chances of getting infected with H.I.V., said Dr. Jennifer McQuiston, who is helping to lead the monkeypox response for the C.D.C.

Coming after more than two years of the coronavirus pandemic, the monkeypox outbreak, which began in May, has been yet another challenge for beleaguered public health officials around the country. Congress has so far not allocated any money for the response — although Senate Democrats did propose \$21 billion in Covid spending on Thursday — and the public is tired of hearing about infectious disease. The Biden administration has estimated it will need another \$7 billion to combat monkeypox.

And because of the country's federalist system, in which public health is left to the states, coordinating a national response has not been easy, said Theresa Spinner, a spokeswoman for the National Association of County and City Health Officials.

"It doesn't help us to have 57 plans when we have a national challenge," she said, referring to the 50 states plus territories and major cities. Infectious diseases, she added, "don't care about jurisdictional boundaries."

Some states have reported smooth cooperation so far with the Biden administration. "We are getting more vaccine from the federal government, and they've been really responsive," said Dr. Clay Marsh, the executive dean for health sciences at West Virginia University, who helped lead the state's Covid response.

Patrick Allen, the director of the Oregon Health Authority, said the state was already strained by its Covid-19 response and bracing for monkeypox cases to continue rising.

"Everybody is stretched really thin," he said. "That's really obvious. The systems that have been taxed really hard through the coronavirus are the same systems we have to rely on for monkeypox."

Oregon, which has dozens of confirmed and presumed cases, has not yet experienced intense demand for vaccines but is in great need of more doses from the federal government, Mr. Allen said.

"We're implementing a delayed second-dose strategy for vaccines, to make sure we can get as many first doses out in vulnerable communities and people with exposures," he said. "We know the second doses will come, and we think that maximizes the benefit."

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	07/29 Europe's quest: shrink energy demand
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/07/29/world/europe/russia-europe-energy-gas.html
GIST	In eastern France, a dozen villages have been shutting off their streetlights at midnight. Barcelona is offering home efficiency assessments. Warsaw is subsidizing homes that replace fossil-burning stoves with heat pumps.

With the war in Ukraine spurring soaring oil and gas prices and President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia showing his willingness to use Russia's energy resources as a weapon, towns and cities across Europe are finding different ways to shave energy usage.

As the single largest European consumer of Russian gas, [Germany may be the country most vulnerable](#) to Russia's energy squeeze, but many other countries are also facing, at minimum, high prices and restricted supplies.

The severity or mildness of the coming winter will be a key factor. A mild winter in Europe would reduce global demand for gas, as would continued Covid-related lockdowns in China, which is the world's largest consumer of gas. Conversely, a harsh winter with biting temperatures would increase demand, and send prices even higher.

But European nations can hardly wait to see how the weather turns out.

Seeking to speed up its energy independence from Russia, [Italy](#) has looked to Algeria as a potential new supplier of gas, ramped up renewable energy sources and burned more coal to keep homes lighted and businesses running.

President Emmanuel Macron of France, who has warned that the country should brace itself for a [total cutoff of Russian natural gas](#), has said that to tackle the gas shortage, the government would prepare a measured conservation plan to limit energy use. He has also noted that France's large nuclear power industry makes it less vulnerable than some of its European neighbors.

"Russia is using energy, like it is using food, as a weapon of war," Mr. Macron [said](#) earlier this month.

Élisabeth Borne, the French prime minister, told lawmakers in early July that France would renationalize its state-backed electricity giant, Électricité de France, which produces most of the country's electricity and operates all of its nuclear plants.

In Belgium, the government [reversed a decision](#) to phase out nuclear energy by 2025 and extended the life of two reactors for another decade. And the governments of Austria and the Netherlands have taken steps to pivot to [coal-fired power plants](#) that had either been shuttered or scheduled for phaseout. Those actions, however, have raised concerns that the European Union's effort to achieve net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050 will be driven off track.

Lawmakers in Poland have backed measures that would allow them to increase their gas storage capacity and loosen fuel trading rules, [Reuters reported](#).

[Britain's National Grid](#) offered an assessment of its expected tight energy supply this winter, saying in a report that "while Britain is not reliant on Russian gas to the extent that the rest of Europe is, it is clear that the cessation of flows of gas into Europe could have knock-on impacts, including very high prices."

The organization, which published an unusual early forecast to help the energy industry prepare for colder months ahead, said it would cope with expensive and unpredictable energy, along with any outages, by delaying the closure of coal plants.

National Grid also encouraged greater participation in "demand side response," which appeared to reference the possible need for individuals to curtail or accept limits on electricity usage.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	07/28 San Francisco cites monkeypox emergency
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/jul/28/san-francisco-declares-emergency-state-over-monkey/
GIST	SAN FRANCISCO — The mayor of San Francisco announced a legal state of emergency Thursday over the growing number of monkeypox cases, allowing officials to mobilize personnel and resources and cut

	<p>through red tape to get ahead of a public health crisis reminiscent of the AIDS epidemic that devastated the city.</p> <p>The declaration, which takes effect Monday, was welcomed by gay advocates who have grown increasingly frustrated by what they called San Francisco's lackluster response to a virus that so far has affected primarily men who have sex with men, although anyone can get infected.</p> <p>The city has 261 cases, out of about 800 in California and 4,600 nationwide, according to the San Francisco Department of Public Health. A national shortage of vaccine has resulted in people waiting in line for hours for scarce doses, often to be turned away when the shots run out.</p> <p>"San Francisco is an epicenter for the country. Thirty percent of all cases in California are in San Francisco," said San Francisco Public Health Officer Dr. Susan Philip.</p> <p>San Francisco shut down its primary monkeypox vaccination clinic earlier this week after it ran out of doses, saying it had only received 7,800 doses of a requested 35,000.</p> <p>"San Francisco was at the forefront of the public health responses to HIV and COVID-19, and we will be at the forefront when it comes to monkeypox," said state Sen. Scott Wiener, a Democrat who represents San Francisco. "We can't and won't leave the LGBTQ community out to dry."</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	07/28 Ferry crashes Seattle dock, heavy damage
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/ferry-crashes-into-fauntleroy-dock-sustaining-heavy-damage/
GIST	<p>A state ferry sustained heavy damage after it veered far off course on a Thursday morning run from Vashon Island and crashed into pilings near the Fauntleroy dock in West Seattle.</p> <p>No injuries were reported.</p> <p>A section atop one side of the ferry Cathlamet was crumpled. At least one car was pinned inside the ferry by bent metal. Ferry repairs are likely to take several months.</p> <p>Ferries occasionally hit and damage pilings at the terminals, but impacts that dent a boat are rare.</p> <p>Investigators are looking at what caused the boat to be off course and to crash. Crew members were tested for drugs and alcohol, as is standard, and at least some gave preliminary statements, said Washington State Ferries spokesperson Ian Sterling.</p> <p>Sterling couldn't confirm Thursday whether crew made a radio call to workers on the dock, or a public-address call to passengers during the approach Thursday morning. WSF didn't provide details about the boat speed, or why it was off course. Sterling said it appears the vessel approached faster than normal, as witnesses described.</p> <p>The Cathlamet was so far off course Thursday morning that its left — or north — side struck a bundle of pilings south of the dock around 8 a.m.</p> <p>After impact, the ferry — carrying more than 50 passengers — bounced and drifted south toward shore, said Kevin Callan, who lives along the beach. The Cathlamet wound up near an anchored catamaran in the cove there, until the crew managed to backtrack and maneuver it to the dock, video by Callan shows.</p> <p>"If the tide had been lower, it would have run aground," he said. "It was churning up sand, so you know it almost reached the beach."</p> <p>Ferries chief Patty Rubstello toured the Cathlamet later Thursday, viewing the smashed corner and outdoor passengers' viewpoint from behind yellow tape.</p>

“I have had a chance to get on the vessel and look at the damage, and it’s very significant. It’s a miracle that nobody was injured,” she said. She described the staff as shaken up, but responding professionally to bring the boat safely to its dock.

To help stranded commuters as Fauntleroy Ferry Terminal remained closed for hours, the King County Water Taxi to Vashon Island added a 3:30 p.m. run. Ferry service resumed for the afternoon commute, when the Kitsap arrived at Fauntleroy around 3:20 p.m. to replace the damaged Cathlamet.

Future ferry service

It’s not clear whether Thursday’s mishap will reduce ferry capacity elsewhere in Puget Sound, Sterling said. An ongoing personnel shortage has left the ferry system without enough crew to staff as many sailings as needed.

Since last fall, several routes have been on “alternate schedules,” meaning a single vessel operates instead of two, because of the chronic shortage of mariners, which has been aggravated by COVID-19 outbreaks and workers who chose to leave WSF rather than adhere to vaccine mandates.

WSF has begun the process of restoring normal service as it works to hire more crew members. But the Fauntleroy, Vashon, Southworth is considered a lower priority than four other routes, meaning it’s often only running two boats when it would normally have three.

Investigations ahead

The impact demolished a narrow steel deck, known as the picklefork, that extends over the car deck, and where passengers like to stand and feel the breeze in their faces. At some terminals, walk-on customers use that deck to exit the boat into an elevated walkway, especially arriving from Bainbridge to Seattle.

Sterling said it was fortunate there weren’t many walk-ons coming from Vashon. In addition, deckhands and sometimes the public stand at the bow of the car deck, where a sudden jolt might knock them forward. “If it were coming from Bainbridge, we might have a different story,” Sterling speculated.

Coast Guard Petty Officer Steve Strohmaier said officers from the Puget Sound sector deployed to the scene shortly after they were notified of the crash around 8:20 a.m.

Besides the state ferries’ internal investigation, the Coast Guard will lead a federal inquiry with aid from the National Transportation Safety Board, said Amy Scarton, deputy Washington state transportation secretary. Scarton described the WSF safety record as world-leading and “impeccable.”

She said, “In the history of state ferries we have not had a fatality aboard one of our vessels, so we will take this seriously and we will learn from it.”

On-boat video is probably available to aid the investigation, Sterling said.

As of Thursday afternoon, there was no “smoking gun” and no obvious sign of a mechanical failure, he said.

WSF has compiled a good safety record since it was founded in 1951, causing zero passenger deaths in maritime accidents.

Washington ferries do periodically damage offshore pilings, which to some extent are meant to be sacrificial, to absorb energy and be ruined on severe impact. Certain structures help guide vessels into place, and are designed for everyday minor bumps.

This April, the ferry Kaleetan landed hard at Colman Dock in downtown Seattle, causing some damage but no injuries. And last December, the ferry Yakima destroyed a wide floating structure, known as a dolphin, on approach to the Lopez Island dock, during rough waters, but service continued there.

	<p>In 1998, the Sealth hit Colman Dock hard enough to cause minor injuries to seven people, and knock some wood piling parts onto the deck.</p> <p>The dock approach is an especially sensitive part of navigating across Puget Sound, given that the captain's speed orders are executed below deck by a chief engineer, to increase the throttle, reverse propeller direction or make other speed adjustments. Accurate two-way communication is essential, along with a well-maintained propulsion network, to control the slowdown on approach.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	07/28 King Co. monkeypox infections doubling
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/health/as-monkeypox-cases-rise-king-county-has-only-about-6-of-vaccines-needed/
GIST	<p>The number of confirmed monkeypox infections in King County is doubling each week, and health officials say the county has only about 6% of the vaccine supply needed to provide two-dose shots to those considered at high or elevated risk for the disease.</p> <p>“I think it is important to realize while we have more vaccine that will be available in the relatively near future, we do not currently have an adequate supply,” Dr. Matthew Golden, director of Public Health – Seattle & King County’s HIV/STD Program and Sexual Health Clinic, said at a Thursday briefing.</p> <p>In Washington, 104 people have tested positive for orthopoxvirus as of Wednesday; all orthopoxvirus cases are likely monkeypox, according to the Washington State Department of Health. This includes one person who was exposed outside Washington but tested positive here.</p> <p>Ninety-two of the cases have been reported in King County, the state’s most populous. A majority of the people who tested positive in King County live in central Seattle, the health department said.</p> <p>As of Wednesday, all cases have been among men who had sexual or close intimate contact with other men, according to Public Health – Seattle & King County. Across the U.S., infections also have been concentrated among men who have sex with men, though that hasn’t been true in other outbreaks abroad. Health officials stress that anyone can contract monkeypox.</p> <p>The health department said it has identified at least 20,000 people considered at highest risk for monkeypox, and 20,000 more at an elevated risk. Ideally, Golden said, there would be 80,000 vaccine doses — two per person — to cover the 40,000 people in those groups. The health department has received 4,720 doses.</p> <p>The health department received an initial shipment of 1,420 vaccine doses on July 22 and distributed them to eight sites. It received a second shipment of 3,300 doses Wednesday. The county plans to use one-third in its sexual health clinic, distribute one-third to clinical providers and use the remaining third in community vaccine events that officials hope to have up and running in approximately 10 days, Golden said.</p> <p>The JYNNEOS vaccine of two doses that is meant to be administered four weeks apart is not recommended for the general public. Doses are being prioritized for people who have had close intimate contact with someone who tested positive for monkeypox or are at high risk of exposure to monkeypox.</p> <p>The health department defines the priority group as gay, bisexual or other men or transgender people who have sex with men and meet one of the following criteria: had more than 10 sex partners in the past three months, have a history of early syphilis or gonorrhea in the past year, used methamphetamine in the past month, attended a bathhouse or other public sex venue or had group sex in the past three months, or experienced homelessness/unstable housing and currently lives in a congregate setting and had any sexual activity in the past three months.</p>

King County's eligibility differs from other cities. In New York City, for example, adult gay or bisexual men or other men who have sex with men, and/or transgender, gender nonconforming or gender-nonbinary people are eligible if they have had multiple or anonymous sex partners in the past two weeks. In Vancouver, B.C., eligibility includes having had two or more sexual partners, or casual sex, within the last 21 days.

Some Seattle residents, frustrated with limited supply in the area, [have traveled to Vancouver for vaccines](#). Golden called the reported travels a reasonable thing to do and said he admired that the Canadians were sufficiently prepared.

Golden said the health department is trying to be more targeted in its distribution of doses but expects that to change as more vaccine comes in. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Thursday announced allocation plans for an additional 786,000 JYNNEOS doses, though it's unclear how many will go to Washington state.

He echoed a recommendation earlier this week from the World Health Organization urging those in the high-risk group to consider decreasing their number of sexual or intimate partners in the short- to mid-term.

"This is not a request to have people change who they are, we are not asking people to change their life forever, we are not interested in judging anyone and we are not interested in telling people how to live their lives," Golden said. "But we do want to give people information that can promote their health and help keep our community safe."

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	07/28 Health experts recommend: wear mask
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/health/should-you-still-be-wearing-a-mask-as-covid-rates-climb-health-experts-say-the-answer-is-yes/
GIST	<p>About four months have passed since Washington's statewide indoor mask mandate ended, but some local infectious disease experts and state epidemiologists are hoping recent increasing case rates will remind residents not to relax measures too much.</p> <p>Statewide COVID levels had been rising since mid-March and began to show signs of leveling off in mid- to late-May, according to the state Department of Health's COVID data dashboard. As of early July, the state recorded a seven-day case rate of about 225 infections per 100,000 people, compared to about 42 per 100,000 in March.</p> <p>Much of the state's continued high level of infection is due to the rapid pace of omicron's BA.5 subvariant, which accounted for three times as many COVID cases at the end of June compared to the start of the month.</p> <p>While King County is "actively considering" if and when additional public health requirements might be necessary, there are no definite plans to return to indoor mask mandates at this point, Dr. Jeff Duchin said at a news briefing this month.</p> <p>No additional requirements are currently being planned on a statewide level either, said DOH spokesperson Katie Pope, adding that the department is instead "focused on health system capacity, severity of disease in Washington state, and what is on the horizon in terms of variants."</p> <p>But mask use has seemed to drop significantly since the mandate ended in March, according to data from the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation, a global research center at the University of Washington. Based on a number of self-reported survey results from IHME, mask use started to decline in late January and saw a steep drop in early- to mid-March, as statewide indoor mask requirements ended.</p>

Now, although masking remains effective at helping protect people from infection on an individual level, it's likely doing little to curb the spread of the virus overall, said Dr. Joshua Schiffer, a clinical research professor of vaccines and infectious disease at Fred Hutchinson Cancer Center.

"At an earlier stage in the pandemic response, masks were protective for those wearing them, but also for society at large because wide-scale use likely decreased the rate of spread of infection," Schiffer said. "At this stage, mask use is very low in the highest risk environments."

While masks are no longer required in most places — except health care, long-term care and correctional facilities — state health officials still recommend wearing them in crowded, indoor settings and confined spaces.

"My personal practice is to wear the best masks possible when it is not a great inconvenience such as in clinic, at the supermarket or on a flight," Schiffer said. "However, like most people I am taking measured risks and go maskless at restaurants and sporting events."

According to recommendations from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, at least 12 Washington counties — including King, Snohomish, Thurston and Spokane — are at high community risk and should resume mask-wearing indoors in public and on public transportation.

High risk means the counties have had 200 or more new COVID-19 cases per 100,000 people in the last seven days, or they've had more than 20 new COVID-19 hospital admissions per 100,000 people within a seven-day period.

Rather than impose a new mandate in King County, Duchin said he hopes community members will voluntarily renew their commitment to indoor masking, distancing, good indoor air ventilation and getting vaccinated and boosted.

"COVID-19 is not one and done," Duchin said. "We're not going to be able to have infinite series of mandates."

Restrictions have a role if there is a serious need for short-term and immediate improvement, he said, adding that for the long term, the public needs to take steps to protect themselves and others.

Snug-fitting, high-quality masks, including N95, KN95 or KF94 face coverings, are generally the best ones to use, according to [Public Health – Seattle & King County](#). Residents can also use surgical masks and cloth masks with multiple layers of breathable, tightly woven fabric, though public health officials have noted they're not as high-quality.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	07/28 Ferndale postal service slow delivery
SOURCE	https://www.king5.com/article/news/local/ferndale-postal-service-under-fire-slow-delivery/281-dd746e64-9469-462f-8157-019461d5098d
GIST	<p>FERNDALE, Wash. — Postal Service customers in Whatcom County are demanding answers as mail delays have slowed deliveries to a trickle in some spots.</p> <p>"We have not received mail or packages in two weeks," said Renee Miller of Ferndale. "They mark things delivered that they do not deliver, it's at the post office lost. This is poor management. They have even stopped answering the phones it's so bad."</p> <p>There are reports of people having to go to the post office themselves to pick up the mail, only to be told it can't be located.</p> <p>Customers have reported waits of 30 minutes or more.</p>

There are concerns about medications not being delivered and some of the backed-up packages have been seen sitting outside in the blistering heat.

Sources told KING 5 that postal workers are being forced to work six-day weeks to make up for the backlog.

One source tells KING 5, "I know one man who is on light duty so they allow him to work only eight hours. It's not sustainable."

Congressmembers Suzan DelBene (D-WA) and Rick Larsen (D-WA) sent a letter Wednesday to the U.S. Postmaster General.

It reads in part, "Doctors have reached out to express concern that they are unable to send medications. Furthermore, Washington uses an entirely vote-by-mail system and with the state primary election less than a week away, we are worried about the impact that these delays are having on the timely delivery and return of ballots."

The congress members wanted to know all steps USPS is taking to ensure the timely delivery and return of election mail in Washington state ahead of the Aug. 2 primary.

The letter asked for measures USPS is taking to address staffing shortages in Washington state, proactive moves needed ahead of the November general election and how the agency is using resources and requirements in the Postal Service Reform Act to improve timely mail delivery.

A spokesperson for USPS sent KING 5 a statement Wednesday morning in response to the delays at the post office.

COVID-19 and "other unavoidable situations" led to lower staffing levels, the spokesperson said in the statement.

All ballots for the Aug. 2 primary have been delivered, according to USPS. The post office is behind on packages, but is expected to be caught up by Friday or Saturday.

USPS said it is actively hiring rural carriers and clerks to improve staffing.

"The Postal Service strives to always provide the best possible service to our valued customers," the spokespersons said in the statement. "We apologize for any inconvenience that may have been experienced by customers living in Ferndale. A variety of factors, including a fresh round of COVID-19 impacts and other unavoidable situations hurt our local staffing levels and we simply could not provide consistent service.

"Local and regional management are involved in resolving the issue and have taken aggressive steps to address the concerns, including flexing every available local resource and borrowing personnel from around the state to augment the office. We appreciate the patience of our customers and we apologize for inconsistency."

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	07/28 Truck cargo liquid oxygen explodes on I-5
SOURCE	https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/truck-carrying-chemical-tanks-burning-interstate-5/4VOY3ENAU7FMS6VCV6NZJEPY/
GIST	SEATTLE — Traffic is moving again on southbound Interstate 5 near Mercer Street in Seattle on Thursday evening, after a truck carrying liquid oxygen caught fire and exploded several times. The truck carrying the liquid oxygen displayed warning signs it was carrying volatile chemicals.

Plumes of smoke could be seen billowing in the air and from miles away, as the fiery scene initially shut down both sides of the freeway before 2 p.m.

The fire caused several explosions that could be heard by those nearby.

At one point, one of the tanks that exploded on the truck fell down the freeway's bridge side and landed at a construction site, causing a small fire.

Seattle firefighters called to the scene had limited access to water, as hydrants were far away from the freeway. They also requested help from the Seattle Department of Transportation and Boeing, which provided an additional foam truck to help put out the flames due to the hazardous situation.

By 2:15 p.m. crews had foam on the fire and at 2:23 p.m., an alert system from the city notified residents at Lakeview Boulevard East near southbound I-5 to close their windows and doors to avoid smoke exposure.

The Washington State Department of Transportation alerted drivers that they should expect long delays on southbound I-5 as all lanes were closed, including the Mercer Street and southbound Boyleston ramps.

Chopper 7 flew over the scene of the fire and observed traffic which was backed up all the way to Northgate.

Washington State Patrol said several vehicles overheated or ran out of gas while traffic was backed up.

After 3:45 p.m., the southbound express lanes on I-5 were reopened.

Before 7:30 p.m., the Seattle Department of Transportation tweeted that southbound I-5 was clear and all lanes were reopened. However, bridge inspectors had to make sure the bridge was safe before drivers could use the road again

While the explosion left behind a charred truck, the driver was able to evacuate the scene before the explosions occurred.

The fire and explosions caused damage to some signs on the freeway and had to be removed.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	07/28 Excessive heat warning continues
SOURCE	https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/excessive-heat-warning-continues-cooler-weather-expected-by-sunday/BPQN5B6YDBB7FIW423WTGJD4ZI/
GIST	<p>SEATTLE — As temperatures remain in the low 90s in many places around the Puget Sound region, an Excessive Heat Warning remains in effect until mid-weekend.</p> <p>If the temperatures have been too hot for you, things will be cooling down a little starting Sunday.</p> <p>Here's what to expect for the rest of this week and your weekend.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Hazy skies and another 90-degree day• Humidity declines Thursday to Friday — not as muggy• Cooler air and temps heading into next week <p>There are couple noteworthy changes to our forecast in the Evergreen State.</p> <p>Two fires in California — Oak and Washburn — are sending some hazy skies our way Thursday morning. This is working out to technically be a <i>good</i> thing. Without any clouds the last couple of days, the sun has no barrier to protect us from its incredible heat. With the presence of the smoke aloft, we are now given a little barrier, and this will take our temperatures down about 2 to 3 degrees, which is not anything</p>

	<p>noticeably different, but it's something, and a sign that we're slowly heading in a cooler direction, with 70s coming soon.</p> <p>If you're concerned with air quality, unfortunately, the current heat wave is already impacting our air quality, with "unhealthy" levels taking over much of the Puget Sound. The haze will be high enough in the atmosphere because the fires are so far away that we should have little to no additional impacts. However, this could always change so we'll continue to monitor the forecast with the latest conditions.</p> <p>Even with a 2 to 3-degree cooldown Thursday, temperatures are still hot and both Excessive Heat Warnings and the Heat Advisory will continue through Saturday evening.</p> <p>So, as I've mentioned this week, stay hydrated, stay cool, and avoid long exposure to the sun during peak hours. For those of you without air conditioning and still needing it, check local sale sites: Facebook Marketplace or online garage sales in your area have great deals and usually same day pickup.</p> <p>On Thursday, one thing will feel a little more noticeable than on Wednesday: less humidity. Wednesday was muggy. Thursday leading into Friday morning, the humidity declines.</p> <p>If you're over the heat, there's good news: it comes to an end on Sunday with temperatures back in the 80s, and by next week we'll be back to our "regularly scheduled programming" with highs in the 70s.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	07/28 Heat doubles firefighters call volume
SOURCE	https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/heat-doubles-firefighters-call-volume/KVHN63N725APNATGNNWWLIASQA/
GIST	<p>SHORELINE, Wash. — As the thermometer goes up, so do calls to fire departments. To get a better idea of the work our first responders put in, Shoreline Fire Department invited KIRO 7's Lauren Donovan to ride along with a paramedic.</p> <p>Within minutes of arriving at Station 63 in North City, the first call came in. A 3-year-old in Woodinville fell out of a second-story window. Shoreline paramedic Gabe DeBay says this type of incident happens frequently when homes heat up.</p> <p>"People have all their windows open and little toddlers, they think they can just sit up there and push that frame, and next thing you know they're on the ground," said DeBay.</p> <p>The little one was lifted into an ambulance and taken to Harborview's Trauma Center, where she's expected to make a full recovery.</p> <p>Roughly an hour after that, near Ingraham High School an elderly woman was feeling weak and losing consciousness.</p> <p>"Anytime it's an elderly person, their bodies can't compensate and make up for the heat issues as quickly," said DeBay.</p> <p>According to the medical services officer, not all assisted-living facilities have air conditioning. That is why air movement is critical.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	07/28 Overheated power strip in Federal Way fire
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/local/overheated-power-strip-led-to-fire-at-federal-way-apartments-that-left-100-homeless

FEDERAL WAY, Wash. — Investigators in Federal Way said Thursday that a fire that [destroyed part of an apartment complex](#) during a massive apartment fire on Wednesday was caused by an overheated power strip in one of the units.

South King Fire and Rescue said the cause of the blaze at Terra Apartments, located in the 35200 block of 21st Avenue SW, was accidental and resulted from the power strip.

According to officials, about 100 residents were forced out of their homes and 36 units were damaged during the fast moving blaze that led to one firefighter being treated for heat exhaustion.

When firefighters arrived at the scene, they found flames and smoke coming from the multi-story apartment complex.

Crews used a ladder truck to attack the blaze from the air on one of the hottest days of the year so far in Western Washington when temperatures were in the 90s.

Officials said the building will likely be demolished.

Jennifer Woyak, a third-floor resident who was seen on Air 4 video being rescued and pulled away from the burning building, said there were several frantic moments before and after ladders were put in place so that firefighters could reach her.

South King Fire crews rescued a woman from an upper floor after a blaze broke out at the apartment complex.

"I ended up opening up my front door to look out and the ceiling in the hallway is just on the floor, in front of my door," she said. "I said, 'Well I'm not leaving that way.'"

She then went to her balcony, "had a moment when I was up there and I was like, 'how am I going to get down?' Got out to my porch and I didn't realize how bad it was until I got out there and I saw the residents and I said, 'hey I'm up here help!' They put a ladder up, one of the residents, or somebody put a ladder up."

Woyak was safely rescued from the area. She thanked the residents and first responders for their quick action.

South King Fire crews rescued a woman from an upper floor after a blaze broke out at the apartment complex.

On Thursday, Woyak was back at the apartment complex trying to figure out what she was going to do next.

Resident Carlos Juarez also shared cell phone video he recorded of Woyak's rescue.

Juarez told KOMO News Thursday that he was also still trying to figure everything out, "trying to get my car, trying to get some clothes, or something," he said.

A temporary Red Cross Shelter has been set up at the Federal Way Community Center. It is available for those displaced by the apartment fire, food and a place to sleep is also available, volunteers are onsite to help.

Terra Apartment Homes staff told KOMO News that they will work to house the residents who lost their homes by offering them available units if they wish to make the move.

[Return to Top](#)

SOURCE	https://www.krem.com/article/news/local/wildfire/wildfires-definite-possibility-inland-northwest/293-df285c68-33ab-4125-9aee-872ae67dfe79
GIST	<p>SPOKANE, Wash. — As we head into the hottest, driest stretch of summer, wildfires remain top of mind across much of the western U.S.</p> <p>Last year, wildfire season started early and aggressively thanks to ongoing droughts and very hot temperatures. In fact, the state of Washington saw more wildfires by the end of April 2021 than it has seen so far in 2022.</p> <p>Our cool, wet start to the year played a big role in delaying the start of our fire season. The increased atmospheric moisture and cooler temperatures kept vegetation from drying out and becoming fire fuel. But as hot dry days return, that will change.</p> <p>Despite our cool wet spring, wildfire season is still forecast to be near normal. Wildfires are normal for the Inland Northwest. What isn't normal are the extended fire seasons and mega fires of recent years.</p> <p>Washington currently sits at about a third of normal in terms of normal. The forecast is still to be near normal in the coming months. One reason is, as all of the long grass that flourished during those wet cool months dries out, it becomes fine fuel for fires. And because of that wet spring and start to summer, there is more of it to burn this year.</p> <p>The Northwest has all different types of wildfire fuel from grasses to thick, lush, dense forest with a whole bunch of undergrowth. As the undergrowth dries out, the threat of small fires grows. If the undergrowth starts on fire, it can spread up into trees, trees burn longer and hotter than any of the grass around it would creating a different type of wildfire to battle.</p> <p>Healthy forests around the region have plenty of space between all of the trees and the underbrush typically isn't overgrown. So, that means if a fire comes through it might not go up into the trees. The greatest problem in some of these forests is the deadfall from some of our recent wind storms. It adds more low-level, hot-burning fuel to some of the potential fires.</p> <p>Not only has the moisture from early this year played a big role in underbrush, it's also playing a role in a lot of the trees. Last year drought caused the trees to dry out and become more fire prone, but this year, the increased moisture is in the trees across the Inland Northwest. That means it will be more difficult for giant, fast-spreading forest fires take hold.</p> <p>The fuel in the forests is back to near normal or even a little wetter than what can be considered normal. Grass, however, will continue to dry out. As that happens the abundance of growth this spring and early summer becomes an abundance of fuel.</p> <p>One of the single greatest factors when it comes to wildfire spread is wind. Wind provides oxygen for the fire, and it can help the fire cover a great distance. That fire will move much faster and become much less controlled. Meteorologists work diligently around the clock to make sure the wind forecast is accurate, this time of year that can help assess fire risk and threats of ongoing fires.</p> <p>Almost all of the wildfires here in the Northwest are started by people. That's why it's our job to pay very close attention to what's going on in the world around us. Follow the burn bands, watch the forecast. See if there's any dry windy days and pay attention to red flag warnings or high fire danger. That way, together we can minimize wildfires and wildfire damage across the region.</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	07/28 New data fans concerns of recession
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/07/28/business/gdp-inflation-news#gdp-q2-economy https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/07/28/business/gdp-inflation-news#gdp-q2-highlights

A key measure of economic output fell for the second straight quarter, raising fears that the United States could be entering a recession — or perhaps that one had begun.

Gross domestic product, adjusted for inflation, fell 0.2 percent in the second quarter, the equivalent of an 0.9 percent annual rate of decline, the Commerce Department said Thursday.

The 0.2 percent decline followed a contraction of 0.4 percent in the first three months of the year — meaning that by one common but unofficial definition, the U.S. economy has entered a recession a mere two years after it emerged from the last one.

Most economists still don't think the economy meets the formal definition of a recession, which is based on a broader set of indicators including measures of income, spending and employment. The G.D.P. data itself will also be revised several times in the months ahead.

Still, the data released on Thursday left little doubt that the recovery is losing momentum amid high inflation and rising interest rates. Business investment and construction activity both fell in the second quarter after rising in the first. Consumer spending, adjusted for inflation, remained positive but slowed. After-tax income fell after adjusting for inflation.

"We don't think we're in a recession just yet," said Aditya Bhawe, senior economist for Bank of America. "But the bigger point here is that the underlying trend in domestic demand is weakening. You see a clear deceleration from the first quarter."

A deceleration, on its own, isn't necessarily bad news. The Federal Reserve has been trying to cool off the economy in a bid to tame inflation, and [the White House has argued](#) that the slowdown is part of an inevitable and necessary transition to a period of steadier growth after last year's rapid recovery.

"Coming off of last year's historic economic growth — and regaining all the private sector jobs lost during the pandemic crisis — it's no surprise that the economy is slowing down as the Federal Reserve acts to bring down inflation," President Biden said in a statement issued after the G.D.P. report. "But even as we face historic global challenges, we are on the right path and we will come through this transition stronger and more secure."

Still, forecasters in recent weeks have become increasingly concerned that the Fed's aggressive moves — including [raising interest rates three-quarters of a percentage point](#) on Wednesday for the second month in a row — will result in a recession. There are hints that layoffs are picking up and that consumers are struggling to keep pace with rapidly rising prices.

"The job market doesn't have to turn around that much in order for us to have a recession," said Tim Quinlan, senior economist for Wells Fargo.

[Here are the highlights from today's report.](#)

The top-line number for U.S. [gross domestic product](#) is a composite of positive and negative forces, and the details matter:

- **Consumer spending**, which powers the majority of the economy, rose 1 percent on an annualized basis, a marked slowdown from previous months as purchases of goods declined and spending on services grew only moderately.
- **Home construction**, also referred to as residential fixed investment, sagged 14 percent at an annual rate under the weight of rising interest rates, which have put mortgages beyond the reach of more would-be home buyers.
- **Inventories**, which measure the amount of stuff that's been produced or imported but not yet sold, depressed the overall number by more than two percentage points on an annual basis. Companies still added to their inventories in the second quarter, but more slowly than in the first, which dragged down overall growth.

- **Business construction**, known as fixed investment in nonresidential structures, dove by 11.7 percent on an annual basis, as construction of factories and warehouses — also an interest rate-sensitive sector — slowed.
 - **Federal government spending** shrank 3.2 percent on an annual basis, as stimulus money continues to fade out and oil was released from the Strategic Petroleum Reserve, although defense spending grew 2.5 percent as military aid flowed to Ukraine.
 - **Final sales to domestic purchasers**, which some economists favor as a metric that cuts out volatile inventories and government spending, sank 0.3 percent.
- (All the figures are reported on a seasonally adjusted basis.)

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	07/28 Ukraine harvest piles up everywhere
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/07/28/business/ukraine-grain-harvest-piles.html
GIST	<p>A small army of combine harvesters rolled across an endless farm field on a recent afternoon in western Ukraine, kicking dust clouds into the blue sky as the machines gathered in a sea of golden wheat. Mountains of soy and corn will be reaped in coming weeks. It will all add to a 20-million-ton backlog of grain that has been trapped in Ukraine during Russia's grinding war.</p> <p>Under a breakthrough deal brokered last week by the United Nations and Turkey, Moscow's blockade of Ukraine's grain shipments through the Black Sea would be lifted. If all goes to plan, a vessel loaded with grain will sail from a Ukrainian port in coming days, releasing harvests from a major breadbasket to a hungry world.</p> <p>But despite fanfare in Brussels and Washington, the accord is being greeted cautiously in the fields of Ukraine. Farmers who have lived for months under the risk of Russian missile attacks and economic uncertainty are skeptical that a deal will hold.</p> <p>The roar of the combines on these fields is a familiar racket this time of year, but much of the harvest will go straight into storage.</p> <p>"The opening of the Black Sea ports is not by itself the magic answer," said Georg von Nolcken, chief executive of Continental Farmers Group, a large agro-business with vast tracts around western Ukraine. "It's definitely a step forward, but we can't assume that the deal will bring Ukraine back to where it was" before the war, he said.</p> <p>The blockage has ignited wild price swings for crops and the cost of transporting them. Storage is running out for the latest harvests, leaving many scrambling for makeshift solutions.</p> <p>A missile strike on Saturday that hit Odesa, Ukraine's biggest Black Sea port, jolted confidence in the deal and risked undermining the effort before the agreement could even be put into action.</p> <p>"No one believes Russia won't attack again," said Vasyl Levko, the director of grain storage at MHP, one of Ukraine's largest agricultural produce companies.</p> <p>There is political will from Ukraine's allies: The White House welcomed the accord, as did the United Nations and international aid organizations, which have warned of potential famine and political unrest the longer Ukraine's grain remains blocked.</p> <p>Freeing the grain for shipment is expected to ease a growing hunger crisis brought on by Russia's aggression — not so much because Ukrainian grain may be shipped to desperate countries faster, but because more supplies can help bring down prices, which spiked after the war but have been falling recently. "It's quite positive," said Nikolay Gorbachov, head of the Ukrainian Grain Association. "It's possible to find the way."</p>

Yet even when reopened, the Black Sea ports are expected to operate at just about half of their prewar capacity, experts say, covering only a portion of the more than 20 million tons of backlogged grain. Ships will steer through a path cleared of Ukrainian mines used to prevent Russian ships from entering, and endure inspections in Turkey to ensure they don't carry weapons back into Ukraine.

And it is uncertain that enough ships will venture back. Shipping companies that once operated in the Black Sea have taken on other cargo routes. Insurers are wary of covering vessels in a conflict zone, and without insurance, no one will ship.

In the meantime, Ukraine's farmers are grappling with vast amounts of trapped grain from last year's harvests. Before the war, new crops moved in and out of grain elevators — from harvest to export — like clockwork. But Russia's Black Sea blockage created a massive pileup.

An additional estimated 40 million tons — of wheat, rapeseed, barley, soy, corn and sunflower seeds — is expected to be harvested in the coming months. Storage facilities not destroyed by Russian shelling are filling up, and room is growing scarce for the freshly reaped crops.

At an MHP grain processing center one hour east of Lviv, a truck filled with freshly harvested rapeseed — tiny, shiny and black — dumped its load into a sifter on a recent day. The seed was moved into a dryer and then funneled into a towering silo that still had some room available. A nearby silo didn't: It was filled with soybeans stuck there from the previous harvest.

A bigger worry was what to do with the current winter-planted wheat harvest, said Mr. Levko, whose company uses the grain to make feed for chicken farms it owns in Ukraine, as well as grain for export. With his silos at the Lviv site near capacity, the wheat will have to be stuffed into long plastic sheaths for temporary storage.

The company was scrambling to buy more sheaths, he said, but Russian rockets destroyed the sole Ukrainian factory that makes them, and European manufacturers are swamped with orders and can't keep up, Mr. Levko said.

After the wheat comes the corn harvest. That will have to be piled onto the ground and covered with a tarp to protect it from thousands of crows and pigeons that hover nearby like black clouds, as well from the autumn rains, which can create rot, Mr. Levko added.

"The crops will have to be stored everywhere," he said, sweeping his arm over a vast field. He added that even if the deal to unblock the Black Sea worked, it could take months for Odesa's shipping capacity to help ease the grain pileup.

In the meantime, farmers are trying to expand an alternative labyrinth of transport routes that they have forged across Europe since the outbreak of the war.

Before Russia's blockade, Ukraine exported up to seven million tons of grain a month, mostly on ships that can carry large loads. Since then, Ukraine has been able to get out only around two million tons per month, via a hastily cobbled patchwork of overland and river routes.

Continental Farmers Group used to export harvests through the Black Sea, Mr. von Nolcken said. Deliveries by ship could arrive in the Middle East and North Africa in as little as six days.

But the blockade forced the company to put some of its grain on a circuitous path that involves making a giant counterclockwise circle around Europe on trucks, trains, barges and ships via Poland, the North Sea and the English Channel, through the Strait of Gibraltar and back down to the Mediterranean, an odyssey that can take up to 18 days.

With so many exporters competing to get grain out of Ukraine, the cost of transporting it has ballooned to about \$130 to \$230 a ton from about \$35 before the war, with eastern regions near Russian-occupied zones

facing the sharpest price hikes, Mr. von Nolcken added. At the same time, grain prices within Ukraine have plunged by around two-thirds because the blockade left farmers holding too much grain, threatening the livelihood of many.

European countries have been working furiously to solve one of the biggest challenges: transporting grain by rail. Previously, Ukraine's 38,000 grain cars carried crops mostly to Black Sea ports, but they run on Soviet-era tracks that don't match Europe's. So rail shipments heading elsewhere must now be transferred to other trains once they reach the border.

The biggest opportunity for scaling up exports is with trucks. Roman Slaston, the head of Ukraine's main agricultural lobby, said his group was aiming to get out 40,000 tons of grain per day by truck. By June, trucks were getting out 10,000 tons per day.

But that still relieves only a part of Ukraine's backlog. And with so much added traffic on the road, border crossings are jammed. It now takes four days — instead of four hours, before the war — for grain trucks to cross from Ukraine to Poland, said Mr. Levko of MFP. Getting over the Serbian border takes 10 days instead of two. The European Union is trying to ease backups with fast-track border permits.

"The question is, how long is the situation going to continue?" Mr. von Nolcken said. "On Feb. 24, everybody assumed this would be a one-week exercise. Over 150 days later, we are talking about opening ports again, with reservations."

But a harsh reality is still facing Ukraine. Despite the war, it has been a hefty harvest so far this year.

"We are building up a tsunami of grain, producing more than we can export," Mr. von Nolcken added. "We will still be sitting on crops that won't get out."

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	07/28 Businesses brace; China economic fallout
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/07/28/business/economy/china-foreign-business-economy-covid.html
GIST	<p>A.H. Beard, a 123-year-old luxury mattress manufacturer based in Australia, started eyeing China around 2010. At the time, the family-owned company faced looming competition from low-cost, foreign-made mattresses in its home market. China, with its 1.4 billion consumers and a growing middle class with a taste for premium brands, seemed like a good place to expand.</p> <p>The choice paid off.</p> <p>A.H. Beard opened its first store there in 2013. Before the coronavirus pandemic, sales in the country were growing more than 30 percent a year. There are now 50 A.H. Beard stores across China, with plans to open 50 more. But like most foreign companies operating in China nowadays, A.H. Beard has started to think more carefully about its strategy.</p> <p>Beijing's strict Covid-19 policy has exacted a heavy toll on business. The company's exports into China are no longer on the rise.</p> <p>This month, Chinese officials announced that the economy grew at its slowest pace since the early days of the pandemic. Unemployment is high, the housing market is in crisis and nervous consumers — living under the constant threat of lockdowns and mass testing — are not spending.</p> <p>Now, the once resilient Chinese economy is looking shaky, and the companies that flocked to the country to partake in boom times are being confronted by a sobering reality: flat growth in what was once seen as a reliable economic opportunity.</p> <p>"I certainly don't see China returning to the rates of growth that we had seen previously," said Tony Pearson, chief executive of A.H. Beard.</p>

So far, most companies are staying the course, but there is a steady whiff of caution that did not exist just a few years ago.

Geopolitical tensions and [a U.S.-China trade war](#) have unleashed punishing tariffs for some industries. Covid-19 has [snarled the flow of goods](#), lifting the prices of almost everything and delaying shipments by months. China's [pandemic response](#) of quarantines and lockdowns has kept customers at home and out of stores.

A.H. Beard opened its flagship store with a local partner in Shanghai almost 10 years ago. And like any high-end brand, it rolled out products with prices that defy belief. China became the best-selling market for its top-of-the-line \$75,000 mattress.

Since then, the cost of shipping a container has jumped sixfold. The cost of mattress materials and components, such as latex and natural fibers, have increased significantly. Other worrying signs have emerged, including a housing slump. (New homes often mean new mattresses.)

Mr. Pearson said he is hoping that the Chinese Communist Party congress later this year will clarify “the trajectory for China” and imbue consumers with more confidence. “The economy still has growth potential,” he said. “But there’s always a degree of risk.”

After the 2008 financial crisis when the rest of the world retrenched, China emerged as an outlier and international businesses rushed in.

European luxury brands erected gleaming stores in China’s biggest cities, while U.S. food and consumer goods companies jostled for supermarket shelf space. German car manufacturers opened dealerships, and South Korean and Japanese chip firms courted Chinese electronics makers. A booming construction market fueled demand for iron ore from Australia and Brazil.

Chinese consumers rewarded those investments by opening their wallets. But the pandemic has rattled the confidence of many shoppers who now see rainy days ahead.

Fang Wei, 34, said she has scaled back her spending since she left a job in 2020. In the past, she spent most of her salary on brands like Michael Kors, Coach and Valentino during frequent shopping trips.

Even though she is employed again, working in advertising in Beijing, she now allocates a quarter of her salary on food, transportation and other living costs. She hands the rest to her mother, who puts the money in the bank.

“Because I’m worried about being laid off, I transfer everything to my mother every month,” Ms. Fang said. “It’s very depressing to go from enjoying life to subsistence.”

A more frugal Chinese consumer is a worry for foreign businesses, many of which offer products that are not the low-cost option but a premium alternative. An Jun-Min, chief executive of Ginseng by Pharm, a South Korean producer of ginseng products, said he, too, has noticed Chinese “wallets have gotten thinner.”

Mr. An said sales for the company’s main product, a 2 ounce bottle of a ginseng drink that sells for \$18, peaked before the pandemic. The company shipped 600,000 bottles into China and Hong Kong in 2019.

Sales plunged in 2020 because it was hard to get products into the country during Covid lockdowns. Business has mostly bounced back, although it is still down 10 to 20 percent from the peak.

While Mr. An said he is concerned about the economic slowdown, he remains optimistic that the market for health products in China, and a familiarity with ginseng — an aromatic root said to have health

benefits — will continue to benefit sales. To hedge his bets, though, he is also seeking regulatory approval to sell in Europe.

That is a far cry from the unbridled optimism of the past.

In 2016, when China was its fastest growing and most profitable market, Kasper Rorsted, the chief executive at Adidas, declared that the country was “the star of the company.” Adidas invested aggressively to expand its foothold. It went from 9,000 stores in China in 2015 to its current 12,000, though only 500 are operated by Adidas. Then the music stopped.

After initially projecting that sales in China would accelerate this year, Adidas ratcheted down expectations in May as Covid lockdowns continued to spread. The company said it now expects China revenue to “decline significantly” and that a sudden rebound is unlikely.

For now, Adidas remains undeterred. Mr. Rorsted said on a call with analysts that the company is not planning to slash costs or pull back from the country. Instead, it will “do whatever we can to double down and accelerate the growth.”

Many foreign companies had bet on the rise of a Chinese middle class as a dependable source of that growth. Bain & Company, a consulting firm, said it expects China to be the world’s largest luxury market by 2025, fueled in part by what Federica Levato, a senior partner, said is still “a big wave” of a rising middle class.

But those kinds of predictions look less enticing for some foreign companies that once relied heavily on the Chinese market.

Kamps Hardwoods, a Michigan-based manufacturer of kiln-treated lumber used for homes and furniture, seized on the opportunity to expand in China — at first. At a Chinese trade show in 2015, Rob Kukowski, the company’s general manager, said a Chinese buyer stunned him with a huge offer to buy enough stock to fill 99 shipping containers. The \$2 million order of lumber accounted for four months’ worth of business for Kamps.

Chinese buyers were so desperate for lumber back then that they would visit the company’s booth and refuse to leave until Mr. Kukowski accepted a million-dollar deal on the spot. By 2016, China accounted for 80 percent of the company’s sales.

Kamps soon realized that it was hard to make a profit from the large Chinese orders because many buyers were not interested in quality and only wanted the cheapest possible price. The company started to focus its effort on finding customers in the United States and other overseas markets who were willing to pay more for a better product.

It was fortuitous timing. When China raised tariffs on U.S. lumber in 2018 as part of a trade war, Kamps was better positioned to weather the downturn. Today, China accounts for only 10 percent of Kamps’s sales, but it still has a large indirect impact on the company. Mr. Kukowski said China is such a big buyer of U.S. lumber that a downward price war ensues throughout the industry when it stops spending.

“With their purchasing power being so strong and so much of our product going into that market,” Mr. Kukowski said. “Our industry is going to run into significant problems if their economy slows.”

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	07/28 German inflation 8.5%; high energy prices
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/07/28/business/germany-inflation.html
GIST	Annual inflation in Germany increased in July to 8.5 percent, from 8.2 percent the previous month, as further cuts to natural gas deliveries from Russia created concern that already record energy prices will climb even higher.

Official data released Thursday showed that energy prices were up more than 35 percent from a year ago and remained the most important factor in driving inflation in Europe's largest economy.

"Energy prices, in particular, have increased considerably since the war started in Ukraine and have had a considerable impact on the high inflation rate," the federal statistics office said in a statement. It also cited continued disruptions to the supply chain caused by the coronavirus pandemic and a leap in the cost of producing industrial products as driving the increase.

The overall increase was a surprise. Analysts had predicted the inflation rate would edge lower, according to surveys by Bloomberg and Reuters.

So far, energy providers have been bearing the brunt of the exorbitant increase in the price of natural gas. One financially troubled energy company, [Uniper](#), was bailed out last week by the government, which took a 30 percent stake. But starting this fall, the government will introduce an energy surcharge of several cents per kilowatt-hour on consumer energy bills that will be passed along to utilities. Officials expect the charge will translate to an annual increase of several hundred euros per household.

Germany, which still relies on Russian natural gas for about a third of its needs, has been hit especially hard by Russia's decision to sharply reduce deliveries of the fuel. This week, Gazprom, the energy giant, reduced flows through the Nord Stream 1 pipeline to Germany to 20 percent of capacity, a further restriction on already limited deliveries.

Economists have said the country [is on the edge of a recession](#), as business sentiment declines and officials urge citizens to cut their energy use in any way possible, even by taking cold showers. Last week, the [European Central Bank](#) raised interest rates for the first time in more than a decade to control rising prices amid mounting concerns over an economic slowdown.

The global outlook has worsened in recent months, as inflation has risen in seemingly every corner of the economy and as pandemic-induced disruptions continue to wreak havoc on supply chains. For the eurozone, the bloc of 19 countries that use the euro, the dimming outlook has been particularly acute.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	07/28 Economy all but officially in recession
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/jul/28/us-economy-shrank-09-last-quarter-its-second-strai/ https://www.wsj.com/articles/us-q2-gdp-growth-economy-11658981184?mod=hp_lead_pos2
GIST	<p>Second-quarter gross domestic product dropped 0.9%, the government reported Thursday, putting the U.S. in recession territory after the second straight quarter of economic contraction.</p> <p>The worse-than-expected GDP report will intensify the criticism of President Biden's handling of the economy in the midterm election year. First-quarter GDP contracted at an annual rate of 1.6%.</p> <p>Some economists' informal definition of a recession is two straight quarters of negative growth.</p> <p>But the National Bureau of Economic Research, a nonprofit group of economists, declares official economic downturns using indicators beyond GDP growth or decline.</p> <p>Federal Reserve Chairman Jerome H. Powell said Wednesday that he doesn't believe the U.S. is in recession, pointing to a strong job market and a low unemployment rate of 3.6%.</p> <p>The Fed raised interest rates again Wednesday by three-quarters of a percentage point in an effort to rein in inflation that hit 9.1% in June.</p> <p>Republicans said the Commerce Department's report shows that Senate Democrats are misguided with their new climate-change deal this week to boost spending by more than \$400 billion while also raising taxes.</p>

“Since President Biden took office and the Democrats took control of Congress, we’ve been in an all-out economic tailspin,” said Sen. Steve Daines, Montana Republican. “From the inflation crisis to now an official recession, Montana families are feeling the pain of the disastrous far-Left economic policies from this administration. To make matters worse, Biden, [Senate Majority Leader Charles E.] Schumer and the Democrats are trying yet again to pass their reckless tax and spend bill with disastrous Green New Deal policies that put us into a recession in the first place.”

Mr. Biden said Thursday that the U.S. economy is still on the “right path.”

“Coming off of last year’s historic economic growth – and regaining all the private sector jobs lost during the pandemic crisis – it’s no surprise that the economy is slowing down as the Federal Reserve acts to bring down inflation,” Mr. Biden said. “Our job market remains historically strong, with unemployment at 3.6% and more than 1 million jobs created in the second quarter alone. Consumer spending is continuing to grow.”

Mr. Biden said he is focused on lowering inflation “without giving up all the economic gains we have made.” The president urged Congress to help by approving the Senate Democrats’ deal on climate legislation and a \$52 billion measure to encourage more domestic manufacturing of semiconductor chips.

Republican National Committee Chairwoman Ronna McDaniel said the president can’t escape responsibility for the downturn.

“This is Joe Biden’s recession,” she said. “Biden can lie and deflect blame all he wants, but that will not alleviate the pain Americans feel every time they fill up their gas tanks, go grocery shopping, check their retirement savings, or balance their budgets. Biden and Democrats are responsible for our shrinking economy, and they’re only trying to make it worse.”

The U.S. economy shrank for a second quarter in a row—a common definition of recession—as businesses [trimmed their inventories](#), the housing market buckled under rising interest rates, and high inflation took steam out of consumer spending.

Gross domestic product, a broad measure of the goods and services produced across the economy, fell at an inflation and seasonally adjusted [annual rate of 0.9%](#) in the second quarter, the Commerce Department said Thursday. That followed a 1.6% pace of contraction in the first three months of 2022.

The report indicated the economy met a commonly used definition of recession—two straight quarters of declining economic output.

The official arbiter of recessions in the U.S. is the National Bureau of Economic Research, which defines one as a significant decline in economic activity, spread across the economy for more than a few months. Its Business Cycle Dating Committee considers factors including employment, output, retail sales and household income—and it usually doesn’t make a recession determination until long after the fact.

Whether or not the U.S. is in a recession now, ING economist James Knightley said that a downturn is “really only a matter of time,” given pressure on American households from inflation, equity markets and “the housing downturn really gathering pace now,” which he said “reinforces the feeling that it’s only a matter of time before we’re in a proper recession.”

Most economists surveyed this month by [The Wall Street Journal](#) expect the economy to grow in the third quarter and in 2022 as a whole, though lately they have lowered their estimates.

“We’re seeing a sharp and necessary deceleration rather than a recession,” said David Mericle, chief U.S. economist at [Goldman Sachs](#), adding that slower growth is needed to rebalance the economy’s supply and

demand for goods and services, and cool wage growth and inflation. “I wouldn’t say we seem to be in contractionary territory on a go-forward basis,” he added.

The new figures mark a sharp pullback from the final quarter of 2021, when [GDP rose at a 6.9% annual rate](#). That capped a year in which the economy recovered strongly from the effects of the 2020 pandemic-driven recession and posted its best annual growth since 1984, stoked by low interest rates and roughly \$6.4 trillion of government borrowing and spending since Covid-19 struck.

President Biden took office a year-and-a-half ago pledging to heal a nation battered by the pandemic by boosting a nascent economic recovery with massive assistance from Washington. Headed into midterm elections this fall, the latest figures have [put the White House on the defensive](#) about the state of the economy.

The GDP report underscored the challenges facing U.S. businesses, households and policy makers—including high inflation, weakening consumer sentiment and supply-chain volatility.

Consumer spending, which accounts for roughly two-thirds of total economic output, rose at a 1% annual rate in the second quarter, down from 1.8% in the first quarter. People continued to travel and shop as more people gained jobs.

[Inflation hit a fresh four-decade high](#) during the second quarter, eroding Americans’ purchasing power. The Federal Reserve responded by [aggressively raising interest rates](#), which in turn [cooled the housing market](#), reducing brokers’ commissions and denting construction. The [central bank raised rates Wednesday](#) and indicated more increases were likely.

Residential investment subtracted 0.71 percentage point from GDP. Business investment worsened slightly, with spending on structures and equipment declining.

The U.S. economic recovery is following an unusual trajectory, with [weakening output but strong job gains](#). The unemployment rate, a key barometer of economic health, held steady at a low 3.6% for the past four months, and employers continued to hire at a strong pace. The Labor Department said Thursday that new applications for unemployment benefits, a proxy for layoffs, held last week near the highest level of the year, a sign that the tight labor market is loosening.

Inventories—specifically, the pace at which companies restocked—[accounted for much of the decline](#) in the second quarter, subtracting 1.96 percentage point from GDP. A shift in spending away from goods and back toward services, and rising prices cutting into people’s buying power, left many companies with stockpiles of products they are now discounting to unload.

[Walmart](#) Inc. said on Monday that [it was having to cut prices](#) to reduce merchandise levels at its flagship chain and Sam’s Club warehouse chain. Many manufacturers are also still struggling with pandemic-related [supply-chain disruptions](#).

Business is “a little unhealthy right now” at Best Tool & Engineering Co., according to its president, Joseph Cherluck. The company, based in Clinton Township, Mich., makes tools and plastic components like welding fixtures for vehicle dashboards, and the nationwide shortage of computer chips means [auto makers are pushing back orders](#).

“Autos are waiting for chips and we’re seeing it down the supply chain,” said Mr. Cherluck, adding that he is concerned about the economy slowing. The 15-employee company has frozen equipment purchases and scaled back hiring plans as a result. “I feel uncertain about the rest of the year,” Mr. Cherluck said.

Trade provided one bright spot in the report: Exports rose at a robust 18% annual rate, as demand picked up for American-made goods and more international travelers returned to the U.S. after pandemic disruptions.

	<p>Some economists prefer to look at final sales to domestic purchasers—a subset of GDP that doesn’t include the often-volatile categories of inventories and trade—to better gauge U.S. economic activity. Final sales fell at a 0.3% annualized pace in the second quarter, after rising at a 2% pace in the first.</p> <p>Americans still have relatively healthy balance sheets. After the pandemic hit the U.S. economy in early 2020, increased household saving, government stimulus checks and enhanced unemployment benefits boosted household finances. The resulting “excess savings”—the amount above what they would have had there been no pandemic—remains elevated. According to Moody’s Analytics, excess savings totaled \$2.5 trillion in May.</p> <p>Some consumers are hunkering down now. Aimie Gresham of Essex, Conn., has pulled back on discretionary spending—like dining out and expensive salon visits—to pay the higher prices for basics like oil, electricity and groceries in recent months.</p> <p>“Even my cat’s food has gone up” by about \$10 a bag over the past year, said Ms. Gresham, who works at a retirement financial firm. Her husband’s car has 250,000 miles on it, but the couple decided not to replace it because of the current high prices. “In any other market we would be buying a new car right now,” the 54-year-old said.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	07/28 China leaders: will miss growth targets
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/chinas-leaders-aim-to-keep-economy-running-within-reasonable-range-11659009287?mod=hp_lead_pos7
GIST	<p>Chinese leaders all but acknowledged that the country would miss its annual growth target this year, while signaling that they would stay the course on zero-tolerance Covid-prevention measures and take only cautious steps to support the struggling property market.</p> <p>China’s Politburo, the Communist Party’s top policy-making body, said in a statement Thursday following its quarterly economic meeting that it would aim to keep the economy running within “a reasonable range” in the second half of the year. It also urged stronger provinces to strive to meet their annual growth targets—an implicit acknowledgment that others would miss their benchmarks.</p> <p>Few economists expect China to meet its official goal of about 5.5% expansion of gross domestic product this year, especially after Beijing announced second-quarter growth of just 0.4% compared with a year earlier.</p> <p>Though the 5.5% target was already China’s lowest in a quarter-century of economic planning, an even slower growth rate would have implications for a battered global economy that has come to rely on China in recent years as a vast market and a key link in supply chains.</p> <p>In recent months, China’s economy has been hit by a panoply of challenges, including trade disruptions from the war in Ukraine, the rapid domestic spread of the Omicron variant of the coronavirus and a sharp slowdown in the real-estate sector—a pillar of the country’s economy that some experts say accounts for as much of one-third of overall growth.</p> <p>In contrast to after its previous economic meeting in April, Thursday’s Politburo statement didn’t explicitly mention the 5.5% growth target, saying only that leaders would “strive to achieve the best results possible” and keep the economy within “a reasonable range.”</p> <p>“The 5.5% growth target is no longer a must for China,” Iris Pang, chief China economist at ING Bank, said Thursday, describing the country’s Covid-19 measures as the biggest challenge facing the economy in the remainder of the year. Ms. Pang praised Beijing’s decision to effectively shelve its growth target as a wise move that would avoid the waste and inefficiency of a stimulus drive.</p>

Policymakers have “implicitly walked back from the original growth target,” Larry Hu, China economist for Macquarie Group Ltd., told clients after the Politburo meeting. “It means that they no longer view 5.5%, or even 5% as achievable for this year,” he said.

While the Politburo called Thursday for local governments to deploy all of this year’s funds raised by issuance of special bonds, it didn’t announce any new bond quotas or pull forward bond quotas allotted for next year, as many economists had expected—suggesting that Beijing isn’t seeking to dramatically stimulate growth. As of the midway point of the year, Chinese local governments had already issued 93% of this year’s allocation of special bonds, according to the Finance Ministry.

Still, the Politburo said Thursday that it would introduce policies to expand domestic demand and extend more loans to companies forced to suspend production by Covid-19 outbreaks.

The Politburo also directly addressed two intertwined challenges that it is facing: A mortgage strike among home buyers that has raised concerns about the real-estate sector and the rural banking system, which relies heavily on property sales.

In response, China’s top leaders said they would work to resolve risk in the rural banking system and vowed to stabilize China’s property market. The Politburo said local governments should take direct responsibility for securing the deliveries of unfinished homes and protecting people’s livelihoods, while supporting organic demand for housing.

Chinese leaders, however, signaled no deviation from their broader goal of reining in the property sector by wringing out speculative activity and curbing developers’ debt-fueled growth.

By reaffirming its mantra that “houses are for living in, not for speculating on” in its Thursday statement, the Politburo defied hopes among some economists that Beijing [would take a more proactive approach](#) to propping up property sales and prices.

Separately on Thursday, the Politburo signaled that it would ease off on [the regulatory campaign](#) that it had launched against [Ant Group Co. and other large internet platforms](#) nearly two years ago, saying that it would approve a batch of investment made by internet companies.

As China’s economy hit choppy waters in the spring and early summer, senior leaders began playing down the importance of meeting the 5.5% target they had set in March.

China’s weak second-quarter GDP performance meant that it would need to notch up economic growth of around 8% in the second half of the year to meet that goal—an implausible outcome in the absence of significant changes to Beijing’s policy of crushing Covid-19 outbreaks as they emerge.

In late June, during a visit to the central city of Wuhan, where Covid-19 first exploded in early 2020, President Xi Jinping said he preferred that China endure temporary economic pain rather than allow the virus to compromise public health. He also tweaked his pledge by saying the government would “strive to achieve relatively good economic development this year.”

Mr. Xi’s top deputy, Premier Li Keqiang, also shifted his tone last week to de-emphasize economic growth, saying that Beijing wouldn’t resort to massive stimulus measures to meet “an overly highly growth target.” Mr. Li also said the government’s priority would be to keep employment and prices stable, and to “strive to achieve relatively good economic development this year.”

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	07/28 Ukraine forces reclaim lost advantage?
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/07/28/ukraine-russia-war-himars-missiles/

KYIV, Ukraine — Russian advances in Ukraine have slowed almost to a standstill as newly delivered Western weapons help Ukrainian forces reclaim much of the advantage they had lost in recent months, opening a window of opportunity to turn the tide of the war in their favor again.

Russian troops have made no significant territorial gains since the Ukrainian retreat on July 2 from the eastern city of Lysychansk under withering artillery fire. The retreat gave Russia full control over Luhansk, one of the two oblasts, or regions, that make up the broader eastern Donbas area, and it marked Russia's only meaningful strategic success since its retreat from territory around Kyiv in April.

The lack of progress may be explained at least in part by the “operational pause” declared by Russia's Defense Ministry after the seizure of Lysychansk — to allow Russian troops a chance to “rest and develop their combat capabilities,” in the words of President Vladimir Putin.

But the so-called pause did not halt Russian attempts to probe and penetrate Ukrainian lines — and the official end of the pause, announced by Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu on July 15, has brought no noticeable increase in the intensity of Russia's assaults, said George Barros, a geospatial and Russia analyst with the Institute for the Study of War.

Rather, Barros and many Western officials and analysts suspect that the Russians are close to [exhausting](#) their capacity to make further territorial gains as their depleted army confronts Ukrainian forces with newly acquired capabilities. Already forced to abandon their hopes of capturing the capital, Russian forces may soon have to reckon with their inability to conquer the entirety of the Donbas region — the only publicly declared goal of the initial invasion and the focus of current offensive ambitions.

Russia may succeed in capturing one or two more of the Donbas towns in its immediate line of fire, such as Siversk and the nearby town of Bakhmut, said Barros, but it is hard to see its existing army pressing much farther than that.

“It does seem the Russians' ability for forward movement is petering out,” said Phillips O'Brien, a professor of strategic studies at the University of St. Andrews in Scotland. “I don't see them being able to advance much more in the Donbas.”

It is still too early to dismiss the Russian force, analysts say. A massive [recruitment](#) campaign is underway across Russia that may yet generate the manpower it desperately needs to compensate for its enormous losses. Russia adapted its goals and tactics after stumbling around Kyiv and may adapt them again, said a Western official who spoke on the condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to speak on the record. He noted that Russia also has capabilities it has not yet utilized that could take the war in a different and alarming direction, an ominous reference to Russia's chemical and nuclear stockpiles.

In the meantime, the Ukrainian army has the chance to seize back the initiative, taking advantage of the extra range and precision offered by the more advanced artillery provided by Western allies in recent weeks, notably the U.S. High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems (HIMARS) that Ukraine had long sought. “Right now, the Russians are losing the initiative, and the Ukrainians either have it or are about to have it,” Barros said. “The HIMARS are key to that.”

The HIMARS give the Ukrainians the ability to strike almost 50 miles behind Russian lines with a high degree of accuracy, and Ukrainians have used them to destroy [more than 100](#) high-value Russian targets, including command and control centers, ammunition storage sites and logistics and support facilities, according to a senior U.S. defense official who spoke on the condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to divulge the information.

Most recently, Ukrainian forces have been utilizing the HIMARS to press a fledgling counteroffensive toward the strategically vital southern city of Kherson, which was occupied by Russia in the first days of the war.

The Ukrainian counteroffensive is “gathering momentum,” Britain’s Ministry of Defense said in a [tweet](#) on Thursday, after a third HIMARS attack Tuesday against the Antonovsky Bridge across the Dnieper River severely damaged a vital road link.

The bridge, more than half a mile long, provides the main supply route between Russia’s 49th Army stationed on the west bank of the river and the rest of the Russian force, and the attack leaves the troops there “highly vulnerable,” the tweet added.

It remains unclear whether strikes have permanently rendered the bridge unusable, but videos posted on social media showed significant damage and signs indicating the bridge is at least temporarily closed.

“The Ukrainians have changed the character of the conflict with their ability to attack behind Russian lines,” O’Brien said. “What we will see in the next few months is the initiative swing back to the Ukrainians, and then we will have to see if the Ukrainians can push the Russians back.”

The biggest effect of the HIMARS so far has been to erode the Russians’ overwhelming artillery advantage, both in terms of the number of guns and the rounds they can fire, said Rob Lee of the Philadelphia-based Foreign Policy Research Institute.

After Russia pivoted to the eastern front and began slowly taking territory from the Ukrainians, the artillery edge “was probably a deciding factor,” he said. “They were firing by an enormous magnitude more rounds a day than Ukraine was, and over time it becomes really hard. Soldiers can’t withstand that.”

By using the HIMARS to destroy ammunition stocks, Ukraine has forced the Russians to move ammunition depots farther away from the front, lengthening their supply lines and complicating the logistics of getting artillery shells to the units that need them. “Russia doesn’t have a good automated logistical system; it requires a lot of manual labor, and that means it’s not very efficient,” Lee said.

By striking command and control centers, Ukraine is taking out the officers and commanders who would issue the orders to mitigate the impact of the HIMARS. “We know from the way that the Russians fight that they need someone to tell them what to do. And when you are able to kill the people that tell them what to do, you’re able to stop those folks from moving forward,” the U.S. official explained.

But while the HIMARS have blunted Russia’s ability to advance, they won’t help Ukraine make territorial gains, said Lee, a former infantry officer in the U.S. Marines. That will depend more on Ukraine’s ability to field sufficient manpower, conventional artillery and ammunition to roll back Russian troops, and Russia still maintains an overall numerical edge, he said.

There are particular concerns about whether the West will be able to continue to supply the Ukrainians with the amount of ammunition they need for their artillery, including for the HIMARS, Lee added.

That concern was echoed last week by the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Gen. Mark A. Milley, in a briefing with reporters. Although the Ukrainians have sought a bigger number of systems, “the issue will become ammunition and the consumption rates,” he said. “We think we’re okay right now.”

But looking beyond the next three months will require careful study by the Pentagon to ensure that U.S. military readiness isn’t compromised, as well as an effort to ramp up U.S. ammunition production, Milley said.

“One reason the Russians are not advancing is the HIMARS, but that doesn’t mean Ukraine is able to retake territory, either. We could see a stalemate-ish situation with not much advancing on either side,” Lee said.

“It comes down to sustainability, and it’s not clear which side has the better angle there.”

HEADLINE	07/29 Wounded Russians compensation elusive
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/some-wounded-russian-soldiers-find-compensation-elusive-despite-putins-pledge-2022-07-29/
GIST	<p>ISTANBUL, July 29 (Reuters) - A week into Moscow's war in Ukraine, Russian President Vladimir Putin made a gesture of solidarity with his soldiers at the front: injured men could claim compensation of three million roubles, equivalent to about \$50,000 or the amount an average Russian worker would earn in four years.</p> <p>"It's our duty to support the families of our fallen and injured war comrades," said Putin when he announced it in early March.</p> <p>But with the numbers of wounded servicemen mounting, some of them are finding that Putin's gesture is not as generous as it initially seemed. Reuters has found that some injured soldiers - including those with significant wounds - are struggling to obtain the compensation, based on interviews with four injured Russian service personnel, a wounded soldier's relative, two people involved with advocacy groups representing soldiers and a lawyer.</p> <p>For some, it's because a little-noticed clarification to the rules has narrowed the criteria for eligibility; others face bureaucratic obstacles or delays in getting applications approved.</p> <p>Maxim Grebenyuk, a lawyer who runs a Moscow-based advocacy organisation called Military Ombudsman that provides legal advice to service personnel in disputes with their employer, said he has received hundreds of requests for help from wounded servicemen chasing the payments. "There's a certain amount of social tension among military personnel" towards authorities in relation to these payments, he said.</p> <p>Russia's defence ministry, health ministry, and Kremlin did not respond to Reuters questions for this article, including about the payment scheme and the numbers of soldiers wounded or killed. Putin in April said the Russian state needed to ensure the "implementation of all our commitments for the welfare of service personnel, especially those who sustained injuries."</p> <p>Five months after Putin invaded Ukraine, the conflict is taking a heavy toll on Russia's military as well as its economy due to international sanctions, according to Ukraine and its Western allies. The United States has estimated that potentially 45,000 Russian soldiers have been wounded and around 15,000 killed, which would equal the Soviet death toll during the Soviet-Afghan war of 1979-1989.</p> <p>Three of the soldiers Reuters spoke to also described heavy losses to their units. One, who said he was as a platoon commander, said that half of his 200-person unit were killed or wounded over a two-month period. A soldier in his twenties said his battalion had initially numbered 700 but by June only about 100 were still fit for combat, with the rest dead, injured or refusing to fight. Reuters was unable to independently verify the accounts.</p> <p>Russia, which says it is conducting a special military operation in Ukraine, has not released casualty figures since March 25, when the defence ministry said there were 1,351 killed and 3,825 wounded. Ukraine has also sustained high numbers of casualties; Kyiv said in June that 100 to 200 Ukrainian troops were being killed per day.</p> <p>Hospitals are also experiencing shortages. Some injured Russian servicemen are arriving at hospitals without enough beds, doctors or equipment to treat them properly, according to two of the soldiers and an official involved in Moscow's military operations.</p> <p>'PRESIDENTIAL PAYMENTS'</p> <p>Putin announced the payments on March 3 during a meeting of his security council broadcast on national television. Two days later, he issued a decree setting out the compensation, commonly referred to among soldiers as "presidential payments."</p>

The decree stated that anyone who suffered a “concussion, injury, mutilation” while serving in Russian security forces in Ukraine would receive the three million roubles.

Seven weeks later, on April 22, the defence ministry issued details on the payment’s implementation that were posted on its website, including specifying that to be eligible injuries needed to be among those described on an official list.

Sergei Krivenko, head of an advocacy group called “Citizen. Army. Rights.” that helps soldiers fight legal cases, said he believed the move was prompted by growing costs. “Three million is such a big amount, at the end of the day. And it turned out there were too many people” who were eligible, he said. The Kremlin and defence ministry didn’t respond to questions about the reason for the rule change.

One Russian soldier caught out by the change was the one in his twenties who described the losses in his battalion. He said he was a gunner in an anti-tank unit and served in Ukraine’s Luhansk region, scene of some of the heaviest fighting. Like other soldiers who spoke to Reuters, he asked to remain anonymous because he feared punishment for speaking to the media.

The soldier, from Southern Russia, said he and his unit were at the front line in early June when a mortar landed nearby and a piece of shrapnel struck his leg. At the military hospital in Rostov he received an official diagnosis: shrapnel wound to the soft tissue of his right lower leg with damage to the muscle.

At another military hospital where he later had an operation on the wound, a surgeon initially told the soldier he would be entitled to the so-called presidential payment but then changed his view, according to the gunner. He said the doctor told him the list of eligible injuries referred to in the April 22 document include a ruptured muscle, but the diagnosis cited only muscle damage.

“I was upset, of course,” said the soldier, adding that since April 22 obtaining the payment had “got complicated.” He said he has since secured a second opinion that confirmed a ruptured-muscle diagnosis with the help of a lawyer, whom he didn’t name.

The soldier has applied to the head of his unit for the three million rouble payment, according to a copy of the July application he shared with Reuters. In late July, he said he had received the payment.

Staff at the hospital where the soldier said he had his operation did not answer calls placed by Reuters. Rostov’s military hospital didn’t respond to a request for comment on accounts that he and another soldier gave to Reuters about their medical treatment.

SPECIFIC CRITERIA

Two other soldiers say they too have been told by doctors their injuries didn’t meet the specific eligibility criteria.

One of those soldiers, in his 40s and from central Russia, said he was serving in a motorised rifle battalion in the Luhansk region when shrapnel from a land mine lodged in his arm. The soldier said he was sent to the same military hospital in Rostov and put in the ear, nose and throat department because that was the only place with beds free. “There’s no space, they put you wherever they can,” he said.

While being treated in hospital, doctors told him that the so-called presidential payment was only being given to people with damaged or broken bones or those who had suffered more severe injuries. He was told his injury involved “only the soft tissue,” he said.

He said he nevertheless applied for the payment and hasn’t received a formal response.

Reuters confirmed he served in the Luhansk region and reviewed copies of his medical records, which confirm his name and nature of the injury.

The other soldier, from Russia's North Caucasus region, was shot in the thigh while serving in Ukraine in April, according to a document issued by doctors at a military hospital in the same region he is from. The document, shared with Reuters by a relative, shows doctors stated his injuries were not included in the list referred to by the defence ministry on April 22.

The relative said the soldier may appeal the doctors' decision so that he can apply for the presidential payment. The hospital didn't respond to a request for comment.

Another soldier, the platoon commander in his mid 40s from central Russia, said he decided not to apply for the payment.

He sustained a concussion when his unit came under attack in the Luhansk region but delayed seeking medical attention because he didn't want to abandon his men, many of them combat novices, according to the commander. Once he did seek treatment at a hospital in eastern Ukraine, he said, a fellow patient who was a colonel told him he would no longer qualify for the payment because of the new criteria. The list referred to by the defence ministry on April 22 said concussion would only be eligible if confirmed by doctors within three days of it happening.

Reuters independently verified the platoon commander's identity and that he serves with Russian forces, but wasn't able to corroborate his account of his injuries or treatment.

QUITTING SERVICE

Some soldiers have not been explicitly told they don't qualify for the payment but have still struggled to obtain the compensation.

Another man, who said he was as an infantry soldier from Moscow in his early 20s, told Reuters that in early April he'd been near the Ukrainian city of Kharkiv when a mortar landed close to him, overturning a truck he was unloading and breaking toes on his foot.

He says he applied in April for the three million-rouble payout and, having received no response, also wrote to the military prosecutor asking for an explanation. Reuters has seen some of his medical notes and a July letter from the military prosecutor's office stating it had contacted the head of the soldier's unit asking that the issue be looked into.

The military prosecutor's office didn't respond to questions about whether there had been delays and if so, the reason for them. A law relating to wounded-soldier compensation payments states that a correctly-submitted application should receive a response within 15 days.

The soldier said he was still having trouble with his foot and had filed a request with commanders of his unit to quit military service. He said: "They put the question to me: will you go back again? And I said no."

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	07/28 Reward: Russia election interference info
SOURCE	https://www.newsmax.com/politics/election-interference/2022/07/28/id/1080849/
GIST	<p>The State Department on Thursday offered a reward of up to \$10 million for information about Russian interference in American elections, including a close associate of Russian President Vladimir Putin and a troll farm that officials say fueled a divisive social media campaign in 2016.</p> <p>The reward, offered by the department's Rewards for Justice program, seeks information about the Internet Research Agency, Yevgeniy Prigozhin — a wealthy businessman whose ties to Putin earned him the nickname "Putin Chef" — and other entities accused in some quarters of interfering in the 2016 U.S. election won by Republican Donald Trump.</p>

	<p>Prigozhin and 12 other Russians were indicted along with the IRA in 2018 as part of special counsel Robert Mueller's investigation into whether Russia had coordinated with the Trump campaign to sway the election. The defendants were accused of a huge but hidden social media trolling campaign aimed at sowing discord on hot-button issues and at helping Trump defeat Democrat Hillary Clinton. Officials say Prigozhin provided funding for the IRA through companies he controlled.</p> <p>None of the defendants has faced trial in the United States. The Justice Department in 2020 moved to drop charges against two Russian firms named in the indictment, saying it had concluded that a trial against a corporate defendant, with no presence in the U.S. and no prospect of meaningful punishment even if convicted, would likely expose sensitive law enforcement tools and techniques.</p> <p>For its part, Trump and his political allies have fiercely denied any collusion with Russia or its operatives to influence any campaign outcome and saying the claim has long since been discredited as part of an elaborate and outlandish political hoax.</p> <p>The State Department described the reward as part of “wider efforts to ensure the security and integrity of our elections and protect against foreign interference in our elections.”</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	07/28 Russia minister ‘Soviet Union would return’
SOURCE	https://www.newsmax.com/newsfront/russia-defense-minister/2022/07/28/id/1080844/
GIST	<p>Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu raised eyebrows in a video clip posted to Twitter, with translations of his recent speech suggesting that "the Soviet Union would return" soon.</p> <p>While the translated remarks were deemed to have been taken out of context, according to Newsweek, it has shed renewed light on Russia ruler Vladimir Putin's invasion of Ukraine that began Feb. 24 as "a special military operation," sparking a war that has lasted into the summer and shows no signs of subsiding.</p> <p>Military strategists have long believed Putin has designs on reconstituting the old Soviet Union, and Shoigu's video clip shared on Twitter fed into that possibility.</p> <p>The translation of the video, leaving out the context of Shoigu talking about the Soviet Union's demise in the early 1990s, when the USSR permitted states to vote to secede from the Soviet Union. Shoigu remarked that Russian leaders felt the Soviet Union would either hold together or vote to reform.</p> <p>"At the time, I am certain, especially among my generation, we were absolutely convinced that all of this was temporary, that our nation would once again be great and powerful, that the Soviet Union would return, and that no one would leave — everyone would live in peace and harmony," Shoigu says in the clip, according to the Newsweek translation, adding that he wished "all those events truly remained history, and were never to repeat."</p> <p>A Newsweek fact-check showed Shoigu did say the "Soviet Union would return," but it was reportedly stated in the context of the 1992 Russian leadership belief that the departed USSR states would ultimately voluntarily return.</p> <p>There were other versions of the translation, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Soon, there will be a Soviet Union again and we will again live in peace," according to one tweet. • "This is all temporary. There will be the Soviet Union again, no one will go anywhere, and we will live in peace," according to another tweeted translation. <p>Regardless of the exact words, the Newsweek fact-check acknowledged that the defense minister's remarks were talking about the past Soviet Union reconstituting, and not Putin's current stated intention to return Ukraine to Russia.</p>

	<p>This is not disputed: Russian officials and state-run media have used terms such as "reunification" and a "coming home" of at least parts of Ukraine — if not the entire country.</p> <p>Newsmax analyst Rick Gates, who has spent years studying Ukraine politics, on the night Putin's invasion began, said portions of Kyiv and those west in Ukraine are too anti-Russian and Ukraine-nationalist to be go along peacefully with Putin's designs to return Ukraine to Russia's sphere of influence.</p> <p>Gates did acknowledge that the southern and eastern regions do have some Russian sympathizers.</p> <p>"The eastern part, obviously their culture, their people, they're very much tied to Russia, the former USSR," Gates told host Newsmax Rob Schmitt. "So they were in a position to kind of just roll over, and that's exactly kind of what you're seeing, which is why Putin is coming from the north and the east."</p> <p>Putin is likely to stick to invading areas easier to keep under Russian control, Gates continued, ostensibly predicting the war movement that would be lasting months later.</p> <p>"I don't think he's going to go much further than Kyiv, because again, I don't think Putin wants this to be a long, drawn-out affair," Gates said. "I think he wants to try to get as much under his control, as quickly as possible, and then face some of the consequences, endured the sanctions, just like he did in 2014."</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	07/29 Ukraine lowers Russian war crimes sentence
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-kyiv-war-crimes-sentencing-1590d0aa9c36870925304fbab5cfba47
GIST	<p>KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — An appeals court in Kyiv on Friday reduced to 15 years the life sentence of a Russian soldier convicted in the first war crimes trial since Russia invaded Ukraine in February.</p> <p>The trial has been closely watched as an early test of whether it's possible to conduct fair trials during the ongoing conflict and of how well Ukraine's beleaguered justice system will stand up to the enormous task of prosecuting thousands of complex war crimes cases.</p> <p>Critics said the sentencing of Vadim Shishimarin, a 21-year-old contract soldier who pleaded guilty to killing a civilian and was convicted in May, was unduly harsh, given that he confessed to the crime, said he was following orders and expressed remorse.</p> <p>His defense lawyer, Viktor Ovsyannikov, had appealed to the court to reduce the sentence to 10 years. He said it was highly likely Shishimarin would be returned to Russia in a prisoner exchange.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	07/29 Eurozone inflation hits record 8.9%
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/inflation-russia-ukraine-prices-european-union-a41427d7237376c965edb9171326a021
GIST	<p>LONDON (AP) — Inflation in the European countries using the euro currency shot up to another record in July, pushed by higher energy prices fueled by Russia's war in Ukraine, but the economy still managed better-than-expected, if meager, growth in the second quarter.</p> <p>Annual inflation in the eurozone's 19 countries rose to 8.9% in July, an increase from 8.6% in June, according to numbers published Friday by the European Union statistics agency.</p> <p>For months, inflation has been running at its highest levels since 1997, when record-keeping for the euro began, leading the European Central Bank to raise interest rates last week for the first time in 11 years and signal another boost in September.</p>

Energy prices surged in July by 39.7%, only slightly lower than the previous month due to gas supply concerns. [Prices for food](#), alcohol and tobacco rose by 9.8%, faster than the increase posted last month due to higher transport costs, shortages and uncertainty around Ukrainian supply.

“Another ugly inflation reading for July,” said Bert Colijn, senior eurozone economist for ING bank, adding that there was “no imminent sign of relief.”

The eurozone’s economy, meanwhile, grew from April through June, expanding by 0.7% compared with the previous quarter, despite stagnation in Germany, Europe’s traditional economic engine. France avoided fears of a recession by posting modest 0.5% growth, while Italy and Spain exceeded expectations with 1% and 1.1% expansions, respectively.

Economists pointed to the rebound in tourism following the COVID-19 pandemic, with short-staffed airports and airlines packed this summer, leading to [travel chaos](#).

With inflation continuing to rise higher than expected, analysts expect economic growth to be the [last glimmer of good news](#), with inflation, rising interest rates and the worsening energy crisis expected to push the region into recession later this year.

“This is as likely to be as good as it will get for the eurozone for the foreseeable future,” Andrew Kenningham, chief Europe economist for Capital Economics, wrote in an analyst note.

Europe’s growth contrasts with the United States, whose the [economy has contracted for two straight quarters](#), raising [fears of a recession](#) with inflation at 40-year highs. But the job market is even stronger than before the COVID-19 pandemic, and most economists, including Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell, have said they don’t think the economy is in recession.

Many, however, increasingly expect an economic downturn in the U.S. to begin later this year or next, much like in Europe.

Europe’s risk is largely tied to its reliance on Russian energy, with [Moscow throttling down flows of natural gas](#) that power factories, generate electricity and heat homes in the winter.

[More reductions this week](#) through a major pipeline to Germany, Nord Stream 1, have heightened fears that the Kremlin may cut off supplies completely. That would force rationing for energy-intensive industries and spike already record-high levels of inflation driven by soaring energy prices, threatening to plunge the 27-nation bloc into recession.

While European Union governments approved a measure this week to [reduce gas use by 15%](#) and have passed tax cuts and subsidies to ease a cost-of-living crisis, Europe is at the mercy of Russia and the weather.

A cold winter, when natural gas demand soars, could draw down [storage levels that governments are now scrambling to fill](#) but has been made infinitely harder by Russia’s cuts.

“With the region’s gas supply now reduced and inflation set to remain high for some time, the eurozone is likely to fall into recession,” Michael Tran, an assistant economist with Capital Economics, said in an analysis this week.

While the European Central Bank has begun raising rates to cool inflation, it had [trailed other central banks like the Fed](#) and the Bank of England in making credit more expensive, fearing the outsize impact of soaring energy prices tied to the war.

The impact of the ECB’s recent rate hike on inflation was “very limited, although it does add to a further cooling of demand in the eurozone,” wrote ING’s Colijn.

	“With a recession looming and inflation reaching new highs, the question is how the ECB will respond to an economy which is already cooling down,” he said.
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	07/29 Isolation complication; hard to shun Russia
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-putin-nato-africa-23b1655316a7ebadf66f96cf9f30b08a
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON (AP) — The Biden administration likes to say Russia has become isolated internationally because of its invasion of Ukraine. Yet Moscow’s top officials have hardly been cloistered in the Kremlin. And now, even the U.S. wants to talk.</p> <p>President Vladimir Putin has been meeting with world leaders, including Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, whose country is a NATO member. Meanwhile, his top diplomat, Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, is jetting around the world, smiling, shaking hands and posing for photos with foreign leaders — including some friends of the U.S.</p> <p>And on Wednesday, Secretary of State Antony Blinken said he wants to end months of top-level U.S. diplomatic estrangement with Lavrov to discuss the release of American detainees as well as issues related to Ukraine. The call has not been scheduled but is expected in coming days. Updates with hyperlinks.</p> <p>The handshakes and phone calls cast doubt on a core part of the U.S. strategy aimed at ending the Ukraine war: that diplomatic and economic isolation, along with battlefield setbacks, would ultimately force Russia to send its troops home.</p> <p>Even as he announced plans for the call, Blinken continued to insist Russia is indeed isolated. He argued the travel of its top officials is purely damage control and a reaction to international criticism Moscow is facing for the Ukraine war.</p> <p>U.S. officials say Russia is trying to shore up the few alliances it has left — some of which are American adversaries like Iran. But countries that are ostensibly U.S. partners, like Egypt and Uganda, are also warmly welcoming top Russians.</p> <p>And after making the case since February that there’s no point in talking to Russia because Russia is not serious about diplomacy and cannot be trusted, the U.S. has conceded it needs to engage with Moscow as well.</p> <p>The public outreach to Lavrov combined with the announcement of a “substantial proposal” to Russia to win the release of detained Americans Paul Whelan and Brittney Griner took many by surprise.</p> <p>A Blinken-Lavrov conversation would be the highest-level contact between the U.S. and Russia since Feb. 15, before the Russian invasion, and could set the stage for possible in-person discussions, although administration officials say there are no plans for that.</p> <p>The Kremlin presumably reveled in the news that the U.S. is now seeking engagement and will likely delay the process of arranging a call to gain maximum advantage.</p> <p>“They are going to drag this out and try to humiliate us as much as they can,” said Ian Kelly, a retired career diplomat who served as U.S. ambassador to Georgia in the Obama and Trump administrations. “I don’t think it goes along with (the administration’s) overall policy.”</p> <p>Kelly said the request for a call is “counterproductive to our broader effort to isolate Russia.”</p> <p>“Other countries will look at this and say, ‘Why shouldn’t we deal with Lavrov or the Russians more broadly?’” he said.</p>

Already, Western appeals to convince Asian, African and Middle Eastern nations to shun Russia appear to have been ignored as Lavrov travels around the world.

Still, Blinken played down the importance of Lavrov's globetrotting. He said it was a response to the cold reception Russia has gotten to Ukraine-related wheat and grain shortages now plaguing large portions of the developing world, particularly as a United Nations-backed agreement to free up those supplies has yet to be implemented.

"What I see is a desperate game of defense to try somehow to justify to the world the actions that Russia has taken," Blinken said. "Somehow trying to justify what's unjustifiable."

U.S. and European officials point out that Russia has come under heavy criticism for the Ukraine invasion and the food and energy security shortages that have resulted.

Biden administration officials, including Blinken, have noted with satisfaction that Lavrov chose to leave a [recent meeting of G-20 foreign ministers](#) in Indonesia after listening to a litany of complaints from counterparts about the global impact of the war.

Despite that, there is no sign Russia will be excluded from major international events such as the ASEAN Regional Forum next week, the United Nations General Assembly in September, or a trio of leaders' summits in Asia to be held in November.

Russia continues to maintain close ties with China, India and numerous developing countries throughout Asia and Africa. Many depend on Russia for energy and other exports, though they also rely on Ukraine for grain.

India hasn't shunned Russia despite its membership in the so-called "Quad" with the U.S., Australia and Japan. With a longstanding close relationship with Russia, India has boosted energy imports from Russia despite pressure from the U.S. and Europe, which is moving away from Russian gas and oil.

India, for example, has used nearly 60 million barrels of Russian oil in 2022 so far, compared with only 12 million barrels in all of 2021, according to commodity data firm Kpler.

On the other side of the coin, the Philippines, a U.S. treaty ally, this week scrapped a deal to purchase 16 Russian military transport helicopters due to fears of possible U.S. sanctions.

The Russian foreign ministry has gleefully countered the assertions of Russia's isolation by tweeting photographs of Lavrov in various world capitals.

Among the photos: Lavrov at the G-20 meeting in Bali with the Chinese, Indian and Indonesian foreign ministers; in Uganda with President Yoweri Museveni, a longtime U.S. partner; and [in Egypt with President Abdel-Fattah el-Sisi](#), also a U.S. partner, whose country every year receives billions in dollars in American aid.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	07/29 Trading blame for POW prison shelling
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-donetsk-prisoners-of-war-30e2e205bab0081c576b944baae82a61
GIST	<p>KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Russia and Ukraine on Friday accused each other of shelling a prison in a separatist eastern region that reportedly killed dozens of Ukrainian prisoners of war who were captured after the fall of Mariupol in May.</p> <p>Russia said that Ukraine used U.S.-supplied HIMARS multiple rocket launchers in the attack on the prison in Olenivka, in the Russian-controlled Donetsk region. Officials from Russia and the separatist authorities in Donetsk said the attack killed 53 Ukrainian POWs and wounded 75.</p>

Russian Defense Ministry spokesman Lt. Gen. Igor Konashenkov described the strike as a “bloody provocation” aimed at discouraging Ukrainian soldiers from surrendering. He said that eight prison guards were also wounded by the shelling.

The Ukrainian military denied any rocket or artillery strikes on Olenivka, insisting that it wasn’t shelling civilian areas and only strikes Russian military targets.

It accused the Russian forces of deliberately shelling the prison in Olenivka in order to accuse Ukraine of war crimes and also to cover up torture and executions there.

The statement denounced the Russian claims as part of an “information war to accuse the Ukrainian armed forces of shelling civilian infrastructure and the population to cover up their own treacherous action.”

Neither claim could be independently verified.

Denis Pushilin, the Moscow-backed separatist leader, said the prison has 193 inmates. He didn’t specify how many of them were Ukrainian POWs.

Ukrainian authorities in the Donetsk region said Russia has pressed on with the shelling of civilian targets in Ukrainian-held areas.

“The fighting in the region has been intensifying by the day, and civilians must evacuate while it’s still possible,” said Donetsk Gov. Pavlo Kyrylenko. “The Russian army doesn’t worry about civilian casualties. They are pummeling cities and villages in the region.”

The [Ukrainian troops in Mariupol](#) were taken prisoner after the fierce fighting for Ukraine’s Azov Sea port, where they had been holed up at the giant Azovstal steel mill. Their resistance has become a symbol of Ukrainian struggle against the Russian invasion that started on Feb. 24.

The Azov Regiment and other Ukrainian units defended the steel mill for nearly three months, clinging to its underground maze of tunnels. More than 2,400 surrendered in May under relentless Russian attacks from the ground, sea and air.

Scores of Ukrainian soldiers were taken to prisons in Russian-controlled areas such as the Donetsk region, a breakaway area in eastern Ukraine which is run by Russian-backed separatist authorities. Some have returned to Ukraine as part of prisoner exchanges with Russia, but families of others have no idea whether their loved ones are alive, or if they will ever come home.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	07/28 China's shadow looms over US this week
SOURCE	https://www.cnn.com/2022/07/28/politics/biden-china-taiwan-what-matters/index.html
GIST	<p>(CNN)China's shadow over the United States has been especially noticeable this week.</p> <p>And that was before the apparently tense phone call on Thursday lasting more than two hours, in which Chinese President Xi Jinping warned US President Joe Biden that when it comes to Taiwan, "if you play with fire you get burned."</p> <p>There are elements of direct tension</p> <p>A full-on diplomatic incident. Tensions are escalating over House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's potential visit to Taiwan, the island with 24 million people that China views as its own territory but which has long been a self-governing democracy.</p> <p>Officials in the US have warned Pelosi of the risks of the trip, including pushing China further toward action against Taiwan.</p>

It's not yet clear when Pelosi will visit, or if the trip will occur. She would be the highest-ranking lawmaker to visit since then-House Speaker Newt Gingrich in 1997.

The US Navy redeployed ships to the South China Sea. It's with Pelosi's possible visit as the backdrop that a US aircraft carrier, the USS Ronald Reagan, and its strike group returned from a port call in Singapore, [according to Reuters](#).

China has gotten more aggressive toward Taiwan. Reporting on the [tense hourslong conversation](#) between Biden and Xi, CNN's Kevin Liptak notes Taiwan has emerged as a key dispute between the countries "as US officials fear a more imminent Chinese move on the self-governing island."

Back in May, while in Asia, Biden seemed to say the quiet part of US foreign policy out loud when he said the US would [respond "militarily"](#) if China was to attack Taiwan.

While the US does not officially recognize Taiwan's government, it does sell defensive weapons to Taiwan -- part of a long-standing policy of "strategic ambiguity," in which the US stays vague on whether it would defend Taiwan in case of a Chinese invasion.

There are warnings about subversion

A 'watershed' warning on tech espionage. CNN recently reported on a scuttled plan by the Chinese government to fund an ornate garden at the National Arboretum in Washington, DC, which US officials were concerned could disrupt US nuclear arsenal communications.

US officials are warning of a dramatic increase in espionage activity by the Chinese government. [Read the full CNN exclusive](#).

There is the all-important economic dependence

Seeking semiconductor independence. A rare bipartisan agreement to subsidize the production of semiconductors in the US was driven largely by the realization that the American tech sector should be able to operate and manufacture more independently from supply chains rooted in China.

The [bill passed the House](#) with bipartisan support on Thursday and is now headed to Biden's desk for his signature.

"Should China decide to withhold its production or inhibit Taiwan from exporting its chips or building them, we would have a serious economic and, eventually, national security issue on our hands," [Biden said](#) on Tuesday from the White House when lobbying for the legislation.

Pushing renewable energy independence. Democrats waited until the semiconductor legislation was on a glide path to passage with bipartisan support before announcing a deal for a different, broader bill -- which they'll try to pass even without help from Republicans.

Still, the deal announced on Wednesday by Senate Democrats for a [health care and climate change bill](#) is meant, in part, to similarly build up the US renewable energy sector to not rely so much on material controlled by China.

The deal is possible because West Virginia Sen. Joe Manchin bought into it. He told a radio show in his home state that the bill would help the US develop batteries for electric cars.

"We rely on ourselves and Canada, Australia and our favored nations without relying on the rogue nations, and those who are doing harm to us or wanting to do harm," he said.

Biden could lift Trump-era tariffs. One conundrum of Biden's economic policy is his failure so far to lift tariffs former President Donald Trump imposed on China.

Biden is said to be [weighing the issue](#), although the tariffs weren't expected to be a main line of discussion between him and Xi, according to Liptak's report. Lifting the tariffs might be politically unpopular on its face, but could help ease some of the inflation that has come to dominate the kitchen-table concerns of American voters.

The US government isn't the only entity struggling to deal with China, which is still a key worldwide manufacturer of so many things, including iPhones. CNN's Rishi Iyengar wrote a must-read about large multinational corporations -- [in this case, Apple](#) -- having trouble quitting China.

Iyengar pointed to Apple CEO Tim Cook's warning that ongoing supply chain bottlenecks, caused by China's continued strict measures to stop the spread of Covid-19, could cost Apple \$8 billion next quarter.

"There is no doubt that tech manufacturing wants to move out of China. They cannot afford the risk of continued disruption to supply, and they want to gain better control over their ability to serve customers," Lisa Anderson, CEO of supply chain firm LMA Consulting Group, told Iyengar. "With that said, China's scale won't be easy to replicate, and so the transition will take time and require investment."

A major escalation over Taiwan would bring both the economic and diplomatic issues together -- and could disrupt the world economy as much or more than Russia's war on Ukraine.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	07/28 Heavy rain, more flooding St Louis area
SOURCE	https://www.cbsnews.com/news/st-louis-flooding-thunderstorms-death-toll/
GIST	<p>The St. Louis area was under a flash flood warning Thursday as heavy rain once again hit the area following what the National Weather Service called a "historic rainfall event" earlier this week. Thursday's flash flood warning is in effect until at least 5:45 p.m. local time, NWS said.</p> <p>"Between 2 and 3 inches of rain have fallen. Additional rainfall amounts up to 1 inch are possible in the warned area, but rain is quickly moving east out of the area," NWS St. Louis said Thursday. "Flash flooding is ongoing."</p> <p>The St. Louis Fire Department on Thursday responded to numerous calls of vehicles that had been stranded on flooded roads. The fire department warned motorists that several feet of flooding had been reported, and said not to drive through standing water.</p> <p>The fire department also responded to a report of a church daycare facility with "multiple persons/children trapped in a dwelling with rising flood water." The fire department later confirmed that it "carried six children to safety from high/standing water." No injuries were reported.</p> <p>Thursday's flooding comes two days after parts of the St. Louis metropolitan area saw up to 10 inches of rain, according to NWS. At least two people appear to have been killed in Tuesday's flooding.</p> <p>Public safety officials discovered one body inside a vehicle that was underwater at an intersection, St. Louis Fire Chief Dennis Jenkerson said at a press conference Tuesday afternoon. Officials had been called to the scene because the car was submerged, and they found the person's remains when the floodwater began to recede around 10 a.m., Jenkerson said.</p> <p>The incident has been classified as a "sudden death" pending further investigation, the St. Louis Police Department said in a statement, and the medical examiner's office will ultimately determine the cause.</p> <p>Another body was found Wednesday in Hazelwood, located just northwest of St. Louis, the Hazelwood Police Department said. Police discovered an unoccupied semi-truck that appeared to have been</p>

	completely submerged in water at one point. After searching the area, they found the body of an adult male who was identified as the missing truck driver, police said, adding that there were "no obvious signs of foul play."
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	07/28 Baby boomers face spike in homelessness
SOURCE	https://www.cbsnews.com/news/baby-boomers-homelessness/
GIST	<p><i>San Diego, California</i> — Maria Negrete, her daughter and her granddaughter live in their car in San Diego after they lost their jobs and got evicted from their apartment.</p> <p>"It's hard because as much as we try, we feel that the system pushes you to the position that we are," the 65-year-old told CBS News.</p> <p>Negrete said she does not see how she and her family will get back on their feet.</p> <p>"I don't see any way, especially with everything so expensive, like gas, the rents, everything," she said. "And that's heartbreaking for me."</p> <p>Negrete is a member of one of the fastest growing groups now facing homelessness: baby boomers. Like her, many worked low-paying jobs and had no savings to fall back on when times got tough.</p> <p>The number of homeless people over 55 is expected to spike to 225,000 nationwide in the next four years — a 32% jump from 170,000 in 2017 — according to a University of Pennsylvania study.</p> <p>"We hear the same story over and over again. 'I've lived in this place 10, 15 years. And now I have to move because they've increased the rent above what I even earn for a given month,'" said Teresa Smith.</p> <p>Smith started Dreams for Change, an organization that helps homeless people by providing jobs and safe parking for those with cars.</p> <p>Nearly half of Smith's clients are baby boomers. The crisis grew during the pandemic and has been intensified by record inflation and housing costs.</p> <p>In San Diego, the average two-bedroom apartment is more than \$3,700 a month, up 21% from last year, according to rent.com.</p> <p>"My biggest concern is that as much as we try, we might be stuck being in the car for a long time," Negrete said.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	07/28 NY declares 'imminent public health threat'
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Health/york-state-declares-monkeypox-imminent-threat-public-health/story?id=87578480
GIST	<p>New York state's health commissioner declared monkeypox an "imminent threat to public health" on Thursday amid a rapid increase in cases.</p> <p>The declaration means that "local health departments engaged in response and prevention activities will be able to access additional State reimbursement, after other Federal and State funding sources are maximized," Commissioner Dr. Mary Bassett said in a statement.</p> <p>The United States has one of the highest levels of monkeypox in the world, with over 4,900 confirmed cases as of Thursday, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. New York has the highest number of cases out of any state reporting those figures, CDC data shows.</p>

There are 1,341 confirmed monkeypox cases in New York as of Thursday, according to [state data](#).

San Francisco declared monkeypox a public health emergency on Thursday, effective Aug. 1, which will also help expedite resources to better respond to the "rapidly rising cases," city officials said. The city has reported 261 cases of monkeypox.

"We need to be prepared and this declaration will allow us to serve the city better," San Francisco Department of Public Health Director Dr. Grant Colfax said in a statement. "Our COVID-19 response has taught us that it is imperative that we mobilize city resources. The declaration helps us ensure we have all the tools available to augment our outreach, testing and treatment, especially to the LGBTQ+ [community] who remain at highest risk for monkeypox."

The Biden administration [continues to weigh](#) whether monkeypox should be declared a public health emergency, federal health officials said on Thursday.

"We continue to monitor the response throughout the country on monkeypox," Health and Human Services Secretary Xavier Becerra told reporters Thursday.

"We will weigh any decision on declaring a public health emergency based on the response we're seeing throughout the country. The bottom line is: We need to stay ahead of this and be able to end this outbreak," he continued.

Last week, the World Health Organization [declared](#) the monkeypox outbreak a public health emergency of international concern. Globally, more than 20,000 cases have been reported in over 75 countries, including in dozens that have not historically reported monkeypox cases.

U.S. health officials have warned for weeks that the number of monkeypox cases would likely increase nationwide, as the government ramps up testing capacity and surveillance.

"We know monkeypox symptoms usually start within three weeks of exposure to the virus, so we anticipate we may see an increase in cases throughout the month of July and into August," CDC Director Dr. Rochelle Walensky said during a press briefing earlier this month.

Monkeypox is primarily spread through close, physical contact between people. Symptoms include fever, headache, fatigue and muscle aches. Patients can develop a [rash and lesions](#) that often begin on the face before spreading to the rest of the body.

Most cases in the U.S. have been reported among the gay, bisexual and other men who have sex with men community and related to male-to-male sexual contact. Though health officials have repeatedly stressed that the virus can affect anyone who has close contact with people who have monkeypox. Those with weakened immune systems, pregnant people and children under the age of 8 may be at heightened risk for severe outcomes, according to the CDC.

"Every American should pay attention on monkeypox," Becerra said. "Monkeypox is not COVID, but it is contagious. It is painful and can be dangerous."

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	07/28 Virginia flooding, state of emergency
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/US/virginia-governor-declares-state-emergency-flooding-devastates-commonwealth/story?id=87597942
GIST	<p>Virginia Gov. Glenn Youngkin declared a state of emergency Thursday night as torrential rainfall and flooding impacted Southwest Virginia.</p> <p>Heavy rainfall in parts of Virginia, West Virginia and Kentucky slammed the region overnight, causing evacuations, damage roadways and people's homes and even deaths.</p>

	<p>"With more rainfall forecasted over the next few days, we want to lean forward in providing as many resources possible to assist those affected," Youngkin said in a statement. "Our team will continue to monitor the situation and provide assistance as needed."</p> <p>In Kentucky, at least eight people have been killed "in one of the worst, most devastating" floods in the state's history, Gov. Andy Beshear said.</p> <p>Beshear has also asked the federal government for assistance as it deals with floods.</p> <p>"The damage suffered is enormous and recovery will be a long-term effort. This assistance is critical to our efforts and essential for our people," Beshear tweeted.</p> <p>Through a state of emergency, Virginia can better assemble resources and send officials with equipment to aid in response and recovery efforts.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	07/28 Los Angeles County avoids new mask rule
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/US/wireStory/los-angeles-county-avoids-mask-rule-covid-stabilizes-87575990
GIST	<p>LOS ANGELES -- Los Angeles County dropped a plan to impose a universal indoor mask mandate this week as COVID-19 infections and rates of hospitalizations have stabilized, a top health official said Thursday.</p> <p>Health director Barbara Ferrer said two weeks ago that the nation's most populous county could again require face coverings if trends in hospital admissions continued under criteria set by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.</p> <p>On Thursday, she said the county managed to dodge imposition of the broad mask rule. The county remains at the "high" CDC level of community transmission, but it could drop to "medium" in coming weeks.</p> <p>Ferrer made the announcement during a briefing at which she displayed flat and declining data graphs. She said transmission has dropped steadily since July 23, "potentially signaling the beginning of a downward trend in cases." Hospitalizations are also down.</p> <p>"We're on a decline right now, and it's hard for us to imagine reinstating universal indoor masking when we're on this significant of a decline," Ferrer said. But she added that health officials would reassess things should case rates and hospital admissions spike again.</p> <p>While masks won't be required in most indoor spaces, Ferrer reminded residents that face coverings remain an effective tool to reduce spread.</p> <p>As it has for most of the pandemic, LA County will still require masks in some indoor spaces, including health care facilities, Metro trains and buses, airports, jails and homeless shelters.</p> <p>The new mandate, which would have gone into effect Friday, would have expanded the requirement to all indoor public spaces, including shared offices, manufacturing facilities, warehouses, retail stores, restaurants and bars, theaters and schools.</p> <p>Nationwide, the latest COVID-19 surge is driven by the highly transmissible BA.5 variant, which now accounts for a majority of cases. It has shown a remarkable ability to get around the protection offered by vaccination.</p>

	<p>It's still unclear what enforcement of the health order might have looked like. Under past mandates, no individuals were cited for refusing masks, and officials favored educating people over issuing citations and fines.</p> <p>Critics of a new mask rule said they didn't believe it would decrease or stop transmission rates. Los Angeles County Supervisor Kathryn Barger said she was pleased with Ferrer's announcement because "unenforceable mandates don't work."</p> <p>"I'm hopeful that we will now be able to move on from this heightened focus on masking mandates to what really matters — focusing on promoting the efficacy of vaccines and boosters, improving access to COVID-19 treatments, and continuing to educate our County's residents on the benefits of masking," Barger said in a statement Thursday. "I am comfortable leaving this decision in the public's very capable hands."</p> <p>The LA County cities of Long Beach and Pasadena have their own health departments that typically align with LA County's rules. But not this time. Both cities said this week that they would not impose requirements for face coverings.</p> <p>And the City Council of Beverly Hills voted unanimously Monday to not adopt a mask mandate imposed by the county.</p>
Return to Top	

Cyber Awareness

[Top of page](#)

HEADLINE	07/28 Concern: 50 companies breached via MSP
SOURCE	https://therecord.media/experts-warn-of-hacker-claiming-access-to-50-u-s-companies-through-breached-msp/
GIST	<p>Cybersecurity experts are raising concerns about an individual on a hacker forum claiming to have access to 50 American companies through an unnamed managed service provider (MSP).</p> <p>MSPs are paid to manage IT infrastructure and provide support, typically by smaller organizations lacking their own IT departments. In recent years they have been singled out by cybersecurity agencies as potentially vulnerable access points for hackers to exploit.</p> <p>Harlan Carvey, senior incident responder at cybersecurity firm Huntress, told The Record that on July 18 someone with the handle "Beeper" had posted in Russian on exploit[.]in asking for help monetizing access to a managed service provider.</p> <p>"Looking for a Partner for MSP processing. I have access to the MSP panel of 50+ companies. Over 100 ESXi, 1,000+ servers ... I want to work qualitatively, but I do not have enough people," the translated message said.</p> <p>"In terms of preparation, only little things are left, so my profit share will be high. Please send me a message for more details and suggestions."</p> <p>Several cybersecurity experts have shared the message on Twitter and other social media sites warning of the potential fallout from the kind of access the hacker purportedly has.</p> <p>Carvey said it appears that the hacker gained access to an MSP's management system and has already done some of the initial legwork.</p> <p>"It sounds as if they're claiming to have done some pre-work, perhaps something like identifying an account with a high privilege level. As a result, anyone who takes them up on their offer isn't going to have to do much 'heavy lifting' to achieve whatever their goals may be," Carvey said. "It doesn't appear</p>

that there's any data involved at this point, per se. Intent isn't clear at this point, and it may depend upon who responds to the ad. The original poster does seem to be offering to answer questions and provide additional details."

Carvey added that based on the typical customer base he sees for MSPs, personal details, business data and healthcare information could be at risk.

[Some online noted](#) that Kansas City-based MSP NetStandard [announced on Wednesday morning](#) that their hosted environment had been hit by a cyberattack. The company did not respond to requests for comment but told customers they discovered the attack on Tuesday and are "working to isolate the threat and minimize impact."

"MyAppsAnywhere services, which include Hosted GP, Hosted CRM, Hosted Exchange, and Hosted Sharepoint, will be offline until further notice," the company said.

"At this point, no additional information on the extent of the impact nor time to resolution can be provided. We are engaged with our cybersecurity insurance vendor to identify the source of the attack and determine when the environment can be safely brought back online."

The cybersecurity authorities of the U.K. (NCSC-UK), Australia (ACSC), Canada (CCCS), New Zealand (NCSC-NZ), and the United States (FBI, CISA and NSA) [warned in May](#) that hackers and APT groups have stepped up their targeting of MSPs in their efforts to exploit provider-customer network trust relationships.

Two of the most prominent hacks from the last two years involved popular MSPs – [SolarWinds](#) and [Kaseya](#) – and caused widespread damage due to the access they have to hundreds of companies and government agencies.

The [CISA alert noted](#) that government agencies are [aware of reports](#) of an increase in malicious cyber activity targeting MSPs, adding that they "expect this trend to continue."

"As this joint advisory makes clear, malicious cyber actors continue to target managed service providers, which can significantly increase downstream risk to the businesses and organizations they support – why it's critical that MSPs and their customers take action to protect their networks," said CISA Director Jen Easterly.

The agencies provided a range of recommendations to MSPs, such as hardening defenses against password spraying and phishing by potential attackers.

Former Obama administration cybersecurity commissioner Tom Kellermann, who now serves as head of cybersecurity strategy at VMware, previously told The Record that cybercrime cartels have studied the interdependencies of financial institutions and have a better understanding of which MSPs are used.

"In turn, these organizations are targeted and hacked to island hop into banks. Rogue nation states love this method of cyber-colonization," Kellermann explained, referring to an attack that targets a third party in order to gain access to another entity. VMware has found that such attacks [have increased 58% over the past year](#).

"I am concerned that as geopolitical tension metastasizes in cyberspace, these attacks will escalate and Russian cyber-spies will use this stratagem to deploy destructive malware across entire customer bases of MSP," he said.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	07/28 Exposed: ransomware cybercriminals
SOURCE	https://www.cyberscoop.com/ransomware-doxxing-conti-cybercrime/

On July 22, a Twitter user who goes by the handle @pancak3 received a warning they'd violated the platform's rules against posting private information. The message included a screenshot of a tweet sent earlier that day containing the name, nickname, date of birth and passport of the alleged developer behind [Predator the Thief](#), credential stealing malware dating back to 2018.

Twitter temporarily locked the account, turning it back over 12 hours later, pancak3 told CyberScoop in an online chat. After the suspension, someone suggested pancak3 instead post the information on the newsletter platform Substack, "and I thought it was a good retention plan."

They launched "[Who's Behind The Keyboard?](#)" on July 24, a newsletter dedicated to doxxing people allegedly associated with cybercrimes. The site contains only a few posts so far and includes information on ransomware affiliates, initial access brokers and two of the REvil suspects arrested in January by Russian authorities and a Brazilian hacker affiliated with the NetSec group. (*Editor's note: Shortly after publication, pancak3 told CyberScoop that Substack suspended their account.*)

Investigating and outing some of the world's most active and notorious cybercriminals is a risky endeavor, one that has resulted in more than a few death threats for pancak3, a security researcher who did not reveal their real identity to CyberScoop and asked to be referred to by the pronoun they.

"People don't really like their real-life identity being posted on the internet, especially criminals," pancak3 said. But the danger is worth it, they said, and could begin to make it easier for law enforcement to go after attacker once their identity is revealed. "Uncovering the person behind the keyboard, the person responsible for the crimes, is my ultimate goal," they said. "I feel like too many of these people think [they're] invisible or invincible, but they're not."

The photos and detailed personal information about the ransomware operators and other nefarious hackers offers a window into the lives of criminal hackers who routinely boast of extorting millions of dollars from victims around the world under [the protection or with the tacit approval](#) of various state entities.

"Ransomware actors, especially those who live in Russia, have existed in this weird space where they are not nation-state actors, but they carry out attacks that have the same or worse impact than many nation state attacks," said Allan Liska, a threat intelligence analyst with Recorded Future.

Unfortunately, he said, ransomware operators typically don't suffer consequences for their actions, and even as law enforcement is "starting to figure out how to deal with these groups, it can be slow and frustrating to victims and defenders alike. What [pancak3] is doing is demonstrating that these actors are not as untouchable as they think they are."

Pictures of the suspects in the newsletter look to be taken from social media sites as they smile into the camera, or pose alongside nice cars. The information is "all open-source," pancak3 said, noting that both the [Conti leaks](#) and the [much larger leaks from TrickBot](#) helped "tremendously."

One entry focused on a Conti ransomware crew developer who goes by the alias "van" includes photos of him standing next to a car, lying on a beach and sitting next to a person whose face has been cropped out. Also included are screenshots showing what pancak3 says is van's computer while "he was infected with an Agent Tesla trojan between February 2021 and October 2021."

Liska said he's not sure how this activity affects investigations but added that "I think it's easier for [law enforcement] to confirm already published information than start a new investigation."

This kind of naming and shaming is not unprecedented. At least twice after the shadowy research group Intrusion Truth named Chinese hackers associated with state activity, the Department of Justice indicted the exposed hackers, cybersecurity journalist [Kim Zetter reported in March](#).

Justice issued [new requirements for federal prosecutors](#) last summer in the wake of the ransomware attacks on Colonial Pipeline and food distributor JBS, highlighting the growing intensity and focus on these kinds of hackers.

Neither the DOJ or the FBI immediately commented on how private naming and shaming effected prosecutions.

The U.S. and Russian governments [cooperated to a limited degree](#) on ransomware prosecution over the summer and into fall, culminating in [the January arrest](#) of more than a dozen REvil associates by Russian authorities. Cooperation between the governments stopped after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, and it's [unclear whether the prosecutions will proceed](#).

pancak3 told CyberScoop they've been in the cybersecurity world "for a while," gravitating first toward malware analysis "because it seemed to be as close as I could get to an actual person." Over time, with additional skills, they got more into open source intelligence, or OSINT. "People will always be the weakest link and a lot of times their egos or just pure carelessness will cause them to make [operational security] mistakes which I, and many others, graciously take advantage of."

pancak3 said they aren't sure how many people they've doxxed in total, they said, but "but in the past few months, well over 150," which includes people in the U.S., South America, Africa, Europe, Canada and elsewhere. "I don't really care where they're from," they said.

William Thomas, a security researcher who's worked with pancak3 as part of a collective of threat intelligence researchers known as [Curated Intelligence](#), said pancak3 is "pretty brave" to be doing this kind of work "considering the cybercriminals likely want to come after [them]." That said, "cybercrime is pretty unstoppable. Many of these people are untouchable criminals," Thomas said. "If this makes their life a bit harder, I'm for it."

Ultimately, pancak3 said, this kind of work is a chance to have a more direct impact on information security.

"To me, you can gather all the IOCs, detect all the TTPs, patch all the systems — literally do everything right and you're still going to get attacked. Why? Cause there's a person behind that keyboard trying to f— you," they said. "If we ID and remove the person, we remove the crime. I'm not stupid enough to think we can remove all cybercrime, but I hope to make a dent somewhere, somehow."

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	07/28 Federal court system sophisticated breach
SOURCE	https://www.cyberscoop.com/federal-court-system-breach/
GIST	<p>The U.S. federal court system faced "an incredibly significant and sophisticated cybersecurity breach" dating to early 2020 that has "had lingering impacts" on the Department of Justice and other agencies, House Judiciary Chairman Rep. Jerrold Nadler said Thursday.</p> <p>The committee learned in March 2022 about the "startling breadth and scope of the court's document management system's security failure," Nadler said during an oversight hearing for the Department of Justice National Security Division. "Perhaps even more concerning is the disturbing impact this security breach had on pending civil and criminal litigation, as well as ongoing national security or intelligence matters."</p> <p>Politico first reported the public disclosure of the attack on Thursday.</p> <p>The incident was separate from the SolarWinds breach that affected a range of U.S. federal agencies, Nadler said, as he asked Assistant Attorney General for National Security Matthew Olsen to talk about how many cases in his division the breach impacted.</p>

	<p>“While I can’t speak directly to the nature of the ongoing investigation of the types of threats you’ve mentioned regarding the effort to compromise the public judicial dockets, this is of course a significant concern for us given the nature of the information that’s often held by the courts,” Olsen said. He added that he couldn’t “think of anything in particular” as far as specific cases that the incident affected.</p> <p>A DOJ spokesperson told CyberScoop after the hearing that the agency neither confirms nor denies an ongoing investigation into the matter.</p> <p>Rep. Sheila Jackson Lee, D-Texas, said it would be important for follow-up information from on the cases involved “as quickly as possible” as “this is a dangerous set of circumstances that has now been publicly announced and we need to know how many, and how many were dismissed.”</p> <p>The federal courts system, which is administered through the Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts, said in a January 2021 statement that it had updated procedures for handling highly sensitive court documents after the SolarWinds revelations.</p> <p>The statement noted that a security audit had revealed vulnerabilities in the Judiciary’s Case Management/Electronic Case Files system, and that “an apparent compromise of the confidentiality of the CM/ECF system due to these discovered vulnerabilities currently is under investigation.”</p> <p>The agency did not respond to a request for comment.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	07/28 Saudi Arabia critical cybersecurity partner
SOURCE	https://www.cyberscoop.com/saudi-arabia-cyber-white-house/
GIST	<p>A top White House cybersecurity adviser defended President Biden’s recent trip to Saudi Arabia, saying on Thursday that the Saudis are critical allies when it comes to thwarting America’s digital adversaries China and Iran.</p> <p>Biden has been criticized for the trip and particularly for his decision to give Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman a friendly fist bump despite bin Salman’s alleged connection to the murder of Washington Post journalist Jamal Khashoggi.</p> <p>Anne Neuberger, the White House deputy national security adviser for cyber and emerging technology, didn’t mention Khashoggi during a talk at the Center for a New American Security in Washington. But she did lay out a realpolitik case for working with the Saudis to protect American cyber interests. For instance, she said, the Saudis will prove to be an important partner in ensuring the Chinese telecom giant Huawei, which the U.S. has accused of being a tool for Beijing’s espionage operations, is blocked from further gains as a global telecommunications provider.</p> <p>“We’re very concerned about the Chinese presence in telecommunication networks,” Neuberger told Daniel Silverberg of the Center for a New American Security. “It’s very hard to secure a network if you don’t have confidence in the core gear.”</p> <p>Neuberger said Western telecommunications’ providers have historically had a hard time competing with Huawei in the Middle East because the Chinese government so heavily subsidizes the firm’s products, thereby reducing costs for often cash-strapped governments. The Saudis will help the U.S. convince Middle Eastern and African countries to choose Western telecom providers when they invest in next generation networks, she said.</p> <p>Huawei’s financial advantage should lessen with the advent of Open Radio Access Networks (Open RAN) that rely on interoperable technologies and offer more flexibility, Neuberger said. U.S. and Saudi telecom agencies are working together to fuel private sector collaboration on the rollout of 5G networks and as part of that arrangement the Saudis will do a pilot Open RAN deployment, she said.</p>

Neuberger said Biden administration officials see Open RAN as “so interesting” because it builds on both cloud and software approaches “where the US and other Western countries have a key lead, where the costs can compete.” She said this reality made the agreement the administration forged with the Saudis to partner on Open RAN research “such a priority.”

Neuberger praised the kingdom for putting “real initiative” into Open RAN.

[The recent U.S. trip to Saudi Arabia also yielded a commitment](#) from the kingdom to invest in projects aligning with a [global infrastructure plan that Biden and G7 leaders](#) announced in June. The White House has not said how much the Saudis will contribute, instead describing the kingdom’s commitment to work together with the U.S. to “mobilize” hundreds of billions in investment.

Silverberg told Neuberger that since she offered him a “very concrete deliverable” from the trip to Saudi, he wanted to hear her cost benefit analysis given the president has been widely criticized for meeting with bin Salman.

Neuberger is looking for other countries to “show up” in the cyber fight, she said, an apparent reference to the president doing the same in Jeddah. She also highlighted the importance of partnerships with “counterpart countries” to “align on cybersecurity standards so that we’re speaking to our technology sectors with one voice about how they need to build security.”

Countries throughout the Middle East can be effective partners in fighting the threat of Iranian ransomware, Neuberger said. [FBI Director Christopher Wray warned about Iranian ransomware](#) in June, she said, referring to Wray’s public disclosure that Iranian state-backed hackers had planned a ransomware attack against a Boston children’s hospital.

“We’re working to build secure infrastructure around the world,” Neuberger said. “Clearly, the Saudis are a key player in the region.”

[Neuberger traveled to South Korea this week](#) and told Silverberg she spent much of her time there speaking with South Korean President Yoon about how to block the [North Korean regime from using ransomware to fund its missile program](#).

“The continued advancements and number of launches in the North Korean missile program is a priority for us so given that cyber is such a core driver of revenue, it’s [ransomware] something we must address,” Neuberger said. “We’re doubling down and planning to do much more work to make it riskier, costlier and harder for North Korea to gain funds that way.”

An iron fist may also be needed at home, Neuberger suggested. Calling the [Colonial Pipeline hack](#) a “major milestone in US domestic cybersecurity,” Neuberger said the incident galvanized the administration to act “because it represented status quo. It represented where we were with regard to having a major oil and gas pipeline serving the entire East Coast with no requirements on what their cybersecurity needed to be.”

Neuberger said the administration has put a premium on reaching industry and that she will meet with CEOs from nine railroads next week to provide a classified briefing on the potential for Chinese or Russian disruption of rail networks. These briefings will emphasize the importance of prevention and cyber defense, she said.

Incident response and reporting are only half of the solution, Neuberger said. The other half has to be “a consistent set of mandated cybersecurity practices,” she said.

“We are behind other countries in setting cybersecurity requirements for the critical elements of infrastructure, the most significant water, power, pipelines, hospitals in the country, as well as the technology that crosses all of them,” she said, pointing to recently passed Australian legislation requiring critical infrastructure providers to meet enhanced cybersecurity standards.

HEADLINE	07/28 American Dental Association data stolen
SOURCE	https://www.scmagazine.com/analysis/breach/ransomware-caused-american-dental-association-outage-led-to-stolen-data
GIST	<p>The American Dental Association recently began notifying state regulators that the “cybersecurity incident” it reported in April was actually a ransomware attack, which led to the theft of member data.</p> <p>On April 23, ADA first reported to its members that a cybersecurity incident was causing technical issues and other disruptions for some of its clients, including the Texas and New York Dental Associations. In response, ADA shut down and isolated all of its systems, which affected the member-only access to the ADA and Texas Dental Association websites.</p> <p>TDA later confirmed the incident was definitely caused by a cyberattack deployed on April 21 and the groups were cooperating with federal authorities on a “vigorous investigation.” ADA later followed-up by stating it was also working with third-party cybersecurity specialists.</p> <p>At the time, ADA responded to rumors that data was stolen ahead of the hack by the Black Basta group by stressing that “a data breach has not occurred.”</p> <p>However, its recent notice confirms that data theft indeed occurred and includes additional details about the attack. The “sophisticated” ransomware attack disrupted only certain systems. On April 27, the investigation confirmed “certain information on ADA’s systems was accessed and/or acquired by an unauthorized actor.”</p> <p>The investigation into the extent of the breach did not conclude until June 10. The notice does not share the precise data impacted, just that it was personal information tied to member names. Impacted members will receive complimentary credit monitoring and identity protection services.</p> <p>ADA has since assessed its systems security and reset relevant account passwords, while it works to review and bolster its existing policies and procedures.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	07/28 Phishing campaign targeted 10,000 firms
SOURCE	https://www.scmagazine.com/analysis/email-security/phishing-campaign-targeted-10000-firms-with-business-email-compromise-fraud
GIST	<p>Bad actors are clearly embracing the concept of “go big or go home.” Earlier this month, Microsoft reported that roughly 10,000 businesses were attacked in a months-long adversary-in-the-middle (AiTM) campaign that raked in estimated millions in financial fraud.</p> <p>In a detailed description of the phishing campaign, which is estimated to trace back at least as far as September 2021, Microsoft outlined detailed process diagrams, and described how the sophisticated AiTM attacks were able to often bypass multi-factor authentication (MFA) to meet their fraudulent goals.</p> <p>“A large-scale phishing campaign that used adversary-in-the-middle (AiTM) phishing sites stole passwords, hijacked a user’s sign-in session, and skipped the authentication process even if the user had enabled multifactor authentication (MFA),” an excerpt from the Microsoft site read.</p> <p>“The attackers then used the stolen credentials and session cookies to access affected users’ mailboxes and perform follow-on business email compromise (BEC) campaigns against other targets,” it added.</p> <p>In AiTM phishing campaigns, attackers deploy a proxy server between a target user and the website the user wishes to visit, which the attacker impersonates. This arrangement allows the attacker to steal and intercept the target’s password and the session cookie that proves their ongoing and authenticated session</p>

with the website. "Since AiTM phishing steals the session cookie," [Microsoft research](#) concluded, "the attacker gets authenticated to a session on the user's behalf, regardless of the sign-in method the latter uses," even with multi-factor authentication.

BEC scams caused more than \$43 billion in global financial losses in more than 241,000 incidents between June 2016 and December 2021, based on financial institution filings reported to the FBI's IC3 unit, according to a [notice from the agency](#) in May.

There was a 65% jump in identified global financial losses due to BEC scams between July 2019 and December 2021, according to FBI reports.

"This increase can be partly attributed to the restrictions placed on normal business practices during the COVID-19 pandemic," according to the FBI's public announcement, "which caused more workplaces and individuals to conduct routine business virtually."

Paul Laudanski, head of threat intelligence at Tessian, says that the financial services industry in particular is "often a ripe target for these attacks." Tessian flagged more than two million malicious emails last year, and financial firms were "the top most impersonated industry," receiving 19% of all those malicious emails and accounting for 8 out of 10 impersonation attacks, according to Tessian's recent [State of Spear Phishing](#) report.

Laudanski pointed out that the payments and financial industries are among "the more mature and highly regulated and scrutinized sectors today. Generally speaking, payments providers are more likely to be effectively managing this class of risk compared to organizations in other markets," he added. "That said, no controls are ever perfect and some level of risk always exists."

For its part, Microsoft found phishing attacks double in 2020, according to its [2021 Microsoft Digital Defense Report](#). The software giant anticipated that MFA will provide "an added security layer against credential theft, and it is expected that more organizations will adopt it, especially in countries and regions where even governments are [mandating](#) it," according to its blog post. "Unfortunately, attackers are also finding new ways to circumvent this security measure."

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	07/28 Microsoft SQL servers hacked: bandwidth
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/microsoft-sql-servers-hacked-to-steal-bandwidth-for-proxy-services/
GIST	<p>Threat actors are generating revenue by using adware bundles, malware, or even hacking into Microsoft SQL servers, to convert devices into proxies that are rented through online proxy services.</p> <p>To steal a device's bandwidth, the threat actors install software called 'proxyware' that allocates a device's available internet bandwidth as a proxy server that remote users can use for various tasks, like testing, intelligence collection, content distribution, or market research.</p> <p>Botnets also love these proxy services as they gain access to residential IP addresses that have not been blacklisted from online retailers.</p> <p>In return for sharing their bandwidth, the device's owner gets a revenue share of the fees charged to customers. For example, the Peer2Profit service shows users making as much as \$6,000 per month by installing the company's software on thousands of devices.</p> <p>According to a new report published today by researchers at South Korean company Ahnlab, new malware campaigns have emerged that install proxyware to earn money from sharing their victim's network bandwidth.</p>

The attackers receive compensation for the bandwidth by setting their email address for the user, while the victims might only notice some connectivity slowdowns and hiccups.

Sneaking proxy clients on devices

Ahnlab observed the installation of proxyware software for services, such as Peer2Profit and IPRoyal, via adware bundles and other malware strains.

The malware checks if the proxy client is running on the host, and it can use the “p2p_start()” function to launch it if it’s deactivated.

In the case of IPRoyal’s Pawns, the malware prefers to install the CLI version of the client instead of the GUI one, as the goal is to have the process run stealthily in the background.

In more recent observations, attackers used Pawns in DLL form and provided their emails and passwords in encoded string form, launching it with the functions “Initialize()” and “startMainRoutine()”.

Once the proxyware is installed on a device, the software adds it as an available proxy that remote users can use for whatever task they want on the Internet.

Unfortunately, this also means that other threat actors can use these proxies for illegal activities without the victim being aware.

Infecting MS-SQL servers too

According to Ahnlab’s report, malware operators using this scheme to generate revenue also target vulnerable MS-SQL servers to install Peer2Profit clients.

This has been going on since early June 2022, with most logs retrieved from infected systems revealing the existence of a UPX-packed database file named “sdk.mdf.”

SQL process installing Peer2Profit (ASEC)

Among the more common threats for Microsoft SQL servers are cryptocurrency [coin miners](#) that perform cryptojacking. There are also plenty of instances where the threat actor uses the server as a pivoting point into the network via [Cobalt Strike beacons](#).

The reason behind using proxyware clients is likely an increased chance of remaining undetected for extended periods, which translates into more significant profits. It is unclear how much money actors generate via this method, though.

Furthermore, Microsoft SQL servers are usually located in corporate networks or data centers with abundant Internet bandwidth that proxy services can sell for illegal purposes.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	07/28 Fewer ransomware victims choose to pay
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/ransom-payments-fall-as-fewer-victims-choose-to-pay-hackers/
GIST	<p>Ransomware statistics from the second quarter of the year show that the ransoms paid to extortionists have dropped in value, a trend that continues since the last quarter of 2021.</p> <p>Ransomware remediation firm Coveware has published a report today with ransomware data from the second quarter of 2022 showing that although the average payment increased, the median value recorded a significant drop.</p> <p>Payments down</p> <p>In Q2 2022, the average ransom payment was \$228,125 (up by 8% from Q1 ‘22). However, the median ransom payment was \$36,360, a steep fall of 51% compared to the previous quarter.</p>

This continues a downward trend since Q4 2021, which represented a peak in ransomware payments both average (\$332,168) and median (\$117,116).

“This trend reflects the shift of RaaS affiliates and developers towards the mid-market where the risk to reward profile of attack is more consistent and less risky than high profile attacks,” [comments Coveware in the report](#).

“We have also seen an encouraging trend among large organizations refusing to consider negotiations when ransomware groups demand impossibly high ransom amounts.”

The median size of the companies targeted this quarter dropped even further, with the actors looking for smaller yet financially healthy organizations to disrupt, the company says.

In terms of the most active ransomware groups over the past quarter, statistics that Coveware collected show that BlackCat tops the list with 16.9% of the published attacks, followed by LockBit, which accounted for 13.1%.

Another new trend observed by Coveware is the creation of many smaller ransomware-as-a-service (RaaS) operations that draw affiliates from recently defunct syndicates and perform lower-tier, opportunistic attacks.

Data exfiltration

The double extortion method, which threatens with leaking files stolen before being encrypted, continued this quarter as 86% of the reported cases involved this tactic.

Coveware underlines that in many cases, despite receiving the ransom payment, the threat actors continued the extortion or leaked the stolen files anyway.

In multiple cases, data exfiltration was the main extortion method for many attackers, meaning that many of the incidents didn’t involve file encryption.

This resulted in the average downtime from ransomware attacks dropping to 24 days, an 8% decrease compared to Q1 2022.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	07/28 Phishing threat mirrors landing pages
SOURCE	https://www.darkreading.com/endpoint/apt-phishing-mirrors-landing-pages-credential-harvesting
GIST	<p>A phishing campaign is underway that uses mirror images of target organizations' landing pages to trick victims into entering login credentials.</p> <p>According to a report from security firm Avanan, the malicious actors are then able to use these harvested credentials to gain access to a treasure trove of personal or company files, and access to other applications and other places in the network.</p> <p>The attack flow starts with emails telling targets that it's time to update their passwords, with a button to click. That takes them to a phishing page that appears to be the organization's Google domain, with a pre-populated email address and a Google reCAPTCHA form, further adding to the veneer of authenticity.</p> <p>Here's the interesting part: The landing page is dynamically rendered, so that it changes the logo and background presented to match the legitimate domain from the user's email address.</p> <p>"Though the URL is completely unrelated to the company website, the page looks exactly like the real deal," according to the report, out today. "In fact, it's a bit-for-bit mirror of the actual company site. The end user will have their email address pre-populated and see their traditional login page and background, making it incredibly convincing."</p>

From there, the phishing page will either request the email twice as validation or, use the credentials in real time in order to verify the password. If the password is good, the user will be directed to a real document or to the organization's home page.

Meanwhile, the user's browser receives a cookie that renders the phishing page "unreachable," preventing any further analysis.

Jeremy Fuchs, cybersecurity research analyst at Avanan, explains that the attackers are after usernames and passwords because of what they can access later.

"They are after these credentials because they are incredibly valuable," he says. "Passwords are keys to the kingdom. They can open financial documents, personnel files, employee records; they can lead to bank accounts and medical records. By stealing credentials, the attackers have a whole bevy of information at their fingertips."

Ties to SPAM-EGY, APTs

Fuchs says he's seen this page-mirroring approach off and on for about two years, in attacks from the [SPAM-EGY](#) phishing-as-a-service group as well as advanced persistent threats (APTs).

This current spate of attacks follows the SPAM-EGY group's trademarks, but Avanan researchers note that these attacks differ by targeting Google domains instead of Microsoft 365.

"This represents an evolution of this type of attack and thus may be carried out by a different group," according to the report.

Derek Manky, chief security strategist and vice president of global threat intelligence at Fortinet's FortiGuard Labs, agrees page-mirroring is not a new tactic but certainly an effective one. He points out such mirrored sites are often included in phishing kits that are sold through the crime-as-a-service (CaaS) model

Organizations Should Take Note of Telltale Phishing Signs

A recent [report from Kaspersky](#) says that workers tend to not notice pitfalls hidden in emails devoted to corporate issues and delivery problem notifications. But Fuchs says that, as with most phishing attacks, there are some telltale signs on which organizations need to train users.

"It's important to remind employees to take two seconds and do two quick things: look at the sender address and the URL of the page," he advises. "The sender address is often amiss; that's clue one that something is off. The URL will also likely be off; that's clue two. Infusing that into everything employees do is critical."

Manky adds that any credential transactions should be done securely (HTTPS/SSL), and the certificate should be checked, as the certificate is unique and would not be mirrored.

"Of course, a site that looks completely legitimate will cause the victim to trust further — however, they should not be trusting the content rather the flow," he adds.

Manky also notes that cyber-hygiene training is a necessity for everyone in the organization, with home workers, not just organizations, being targets of cyberattacks.

"Multifactor authentication and password protection can help protect remote workers' personal information, and knowing how to spot phishing emails and malvertising schemes will help employees avoid falling for these social engineering ploys," he says.

Phishers Adopting Sophisticated APT Tactics

Kristina Balaam, senior threat researcher of threat intelligence at Lookout, says as the general public's awareness of phishing threats increases, threat actors seem to recognize that they need to improve their tactics to successfully compromise their targets.

"Users are becoming more discerning and aware of the risks that phishing campaigns pose to their personal and financial security," she explains. "When page-mirroring is used to help ensure a phishing page closely replicates a legitimate authentication portal, users are more likely to place trust in the Web application and miss more sophisticated indicators of compromise."

She adds that while some phishing campaigns may use incorrect branding or contain extensive grammatical errors, these more sophisticated pages may only reveal themselves through less obvious indicators, like slightly misspelled domains (that is, [typosquatting](#)) domains or missing SSL certificates. "Phishers take what works and amplify it. If something works, they'll keep at it," Fuchs says. "Given that many of these attacks are available as downloadable 'kits,' the barrier to entry is far lower."

From his perspective, that means there will likely be a continued proliferation of these types of attack spread by various groups, both APT and non-APT alike. Balaam agrees and says she believes this convergence reflects a shift in the willingness of financially motivated threat actors to increase their investment in their campaigns to improve their success rates and generate a greater return on their investments.

"For IT security, this shift seems to be leading us toward a marked increase in the number of everyday users targeted by more sophisticated campaigns with TTPs previously employed primarily by APT actors," she says.

Other recent phishing campaigns from the current [avalanche of attacks](#) also show ever-greater sophistication, including the [Ducktail spear-phishing campaign](#) and a phishing kit that [injects malware](#) into legitimate WordPress sites.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	07/28 SharpTongue clever mail stealing malware
SOURCE	https://www.volexity.com/blog/2022/07/28/sharptongue-deploys-clever-mail-stealing-browser-extension-sharpext/?web_view=true
GIST	<p>Volexity tracks a variety of threat actors to provide unique insights and actionable information to its Threat Intelligence customers. One frequently encountered—that often results in forensics investigations on compromised systems—is tracked by Volexity as SharpTongue. This actor is believed to be North Korean in origin and is often publicly referred to under the name Kimsuky. The definition of which threat activity comprises Kimsuky is a matter of debate amongst threat intelligence analysts. Some publications refer to North Korean threat activity as Kimsuky that Volexity tracks under other group names and does not map back to SharpTongue. Volexity frequently observes SharpTongue targeting and victimizing individuals working for organizations in the United States, Europe and South Korea who work on topics involving North Korea, nuclear issues, weapons systems, and other matters of strategic interest to North Korea.</p> <p>SharpTongue's toolset is well documented in public sources; the most recent English-language post covering this toolset was published by Huntress in 2021. The list of tools and techniques described in that post are consistent with what Volexity has commonly seen for years. However, in September 2021, Volexity began observing an interesting, undocumented malware family used by SharpTongue. Within the last year, Volexity has responded to multiple incidents involving SharpTongue and, in most cases, has discovered a malicious Google Chrome or Microsoft Edge extension Volexity calls “SHARPEXT”.</p> <p>SHARPEXT differs from previously documented extensions used by the "Kimsuky" actor, in that it does not try to steal usernames and passwords. Rather, the malware directly inspects and exfiltrates data from a victim's webmail account as they browse it. Since its discovery, the extension has evolved and is currently</p>

at version 3.0, based on the internal versioning system. It supports three web browsers and theft of mail from both Gmail and AOL webmail.

Conclusion & Mitigations

The use of malicious browser extensions by North Korean threat actors is [not new](#); this tactic has typically been used to infect users as part of the delivery phase of an attack. However, this is the first time Volexity has observed malicious browser extensions used as part of the post-exploitation phase of a compromise. By stealing email data in the context of a user's already-logged-in session, the attack is hidden from the email provider, making detection very challenging. Similarly, the way in which the extension works means suspicious activity would not be logged in a user's email "account activity" status page, were they to review it.

Deployment of SHARPEXT is highly customized, as the attacker must first gain access to the victim's original browser Security Preferences file. This file is then modified and used to deploy the malicious extension. Volexity has observed SharpTongue deploying SHARPEXT against targets for well over a year; and, in each case, a dedicated folder for the infected user is created containing the required files for the extension.

Volexity has followed the evolution of SHARPEXT due to several engagements handled by its incident response team. When Volexity first encountered SHARPEXT, it seemed to be a tool in early development containing numerous bugs, an indication the tool was immature. The latest updates and ongoing maintenance demonstrate the attacker is achieving its goals, finding value in continuing to refine it. Volexity's own visibility shows the extension has been quite successful, as logs obtained by Volexity show the attacker was able to successfully steal thousands of emails from multiple victims through the malware's deployment.

To generically detect and investigate attacks such as these, Volexity recommends the following:

- Because PowerShell played a key role in the setup and installation of the malware, enabling and analyzing the results of PowerShell [ScriptBlock logging could be useful](#) for identification and triage of malicious activity.
- Security teams responsible for defending highly targeted users by this threat actor may consider periodically reviewing installed extensions on machines of high risk users to identify those not available on the Chrome Web Store or loaded from unusual paths.

To prevent these specific attacks, Volexity recommends the following:

- Use the YARA rules [here](#) to detect related activity.
- Block the IOCs listed [here](#).

If you suspect you have been targeted by SharpTongue, please feel free to [contact Volexity](#).

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	07/28 LockBit success: technical sophistication
SOURCE	https://www.bankinfosecurity.com/keys-to-lockbits-success-self-promotion-technical-acumen-a-19654?&web_view=true
GIST	<p>When the Conti ransomware brand imploded earlier this year, the big question was who would seize its position and become the world's worst - or best, depending on perspective - criminal encryption gang.</p> <p>One clear winner has emerged: LockBit. It claims more victims on its data leak site than any other group. Its malware is technically sophisticated. Its focus on self-promotion and keeping affiliates happy has vaulted it to the bottom - or top - of the list.</p> <p>LockBit even took what might be called a celebratory bow earlier this month with the release of LockBit 3.0.</p> <p>The group announced it would pay a bug bounty of up to \$1 million to any researchers who sold them zero-day vulnerabilities to exploit. It practically issued a challenge, saying the largest payout is reserved</p>

for anyone who reveals the real identity of the group's affiliate program boss. And it trumpeted its mission to "Make Ransomware Great Again!"

Whatever the group is doing seems to be working. "It's certainly one of the more active groups now," says Lisa Sotto, partner and chair of the global privacy and cybersecurity practice at Hunton Andrews Kurth LLP. "They have gotten more sophisticated, and they are announcing to the world that they have achieved a new and higher level of sophistication in their exploits."

Threat intelligence firm [Trellix](#) says LockBit is the most common ransomware strain, accounting for 26% of the total attacks during the first three months of this year, followed by Conti at 13%, BlackCat at 11% and Ryuk at 10%.

Another view of its success comes from counting victims listed on ransomware groups' data leak sites. During this year's first quarter, LockBit listed 220 victims, nearly double Conti, which was in second place with 117 victims, cybersecurity firm [Trend Micro](#) reports.

But counting victims on a data leak site doesn't show the whole picture. For starters, it's a list of alleged victims who didn't pay a ransom versus ones who did. Also, not all ransomware or ransomware-as-a-service groups run data leak sites. "Leak site postings shouldn't be assumed to indicate a group's activity levels. Some operations post only a minority of their nonpaying victims, while others falsely list companies that haven't been hit," says Brett Callow, a threat analyst at cybersecurity firm Emsisoft.

For example, LockBit has falsely listed Mandiant as being a victim, and on Monday, it listed Italy's Revenue Agency. But [Italian media reported](#) that the latter victim instead appeared to be Italian IT services firm GESIS.

"That said, LockBit is certainly one of the busier operations," Callow says. "The reason for this is probably that it's one of the more stable RaaS operations, which has enabled it to attract affiliates from now-defunct operations."

Technical Sophistication

Successful ransomware groups are typically unbridled self-promoters. Hype is meant to scare fresh victims into quietly paying a ransom, as quickly as possible. Brand awareness helps groups recruit highly skilled affiliates, who take the group's ransomware and use it to infect more victims.

One of the ways LockBit tries to differentiate itself from competitors continues to be the sophistication of its ransomware code. Namely, the gang promises that its code will encrypt faster and be tougher to detect and block than the code of rivals.

LockBit offers affiliates two different versions of Windows crypto-locking malware, "written by different programmers, allowing you to encrypt the network twice, if time allows," it says. "It will be useful for paranoiacs who doubt the reliability and implementation of the cryptographic algorithm," or if both get used on a network, to offer free decryption of one of the strains - but not the other - perhaps as a token of goodwill.

Version 3 of LockBit appears to have been overhauled in part by adapting other ransomware source code. Security researchers have found numerous similarities between LockBit and [BlackMatter](#) ransomware - a variant of DarkSide, since relaunched as [BlackCat](#) or Alphv.

On Wednesday, a known LockBit representative, a claimed former member of Conti who [goes by LockBitSupp](#), "admitted purchasing the source code of the BlackMatter ransomware and improving it for LockBit 3.0," threat intelligence firm Kela reports. Tellingly, LockBit also refers to version 3 of its ransomware as LockBit Black.

Among the similarities, Kela says: "LockBit 3.0 code is based on the source code of BlackMatter ransomware; LockBit 3.0 and BlackMatter share the same API harvesting tactic; they both implement the

same anti-debugging technique; share similar routines for privilege escalation; use a Base64-encoded hash string as the encrypted file name extension, ransom note name, wallpaper and icon name."

Unusual Longevity

LockBit enjoys unusual longevity, and the group doesn't fail to highlight this stability in its pitch to prospective affiliates.

"We have been working for 3 years ... and so far we have not been caught by the FBI," LockBit's site says. "If they couldn't catch us in 3 years, they probably never will, and we will keep working."

Experts agree. "Short of intervention by law enforcement, we expect to see LockBit around for the foreseeable future and further iterations of what is undoubtedly a very successful RaaS operation," cybersecurity firm [SentinelLabs](#) says.

Ransomware-as-a-service operations are only as good as the collective might of the affiliates they recruit. The better the affiliate, the more reliable it is at taking down targets, including big game. Accordingly, there's fierce competition between ransomware operations to recruit the most skilled affiliates - or in LockBit-speak, "pentesters."

LockBit so far hasn't come out in support of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, unlike Conti, which [paid a price](#) as many victims then refused to pay.

LockBit claims to be apolitical. "We are located in the Netherlands, completely apolitical and only interested in money," it says on its website.

In reality, experts say, most if not all dominant strains of ransomware are run by Russian-speaking attackers, many of whom are likely located in Russia or former Soviet satellites. Experts say they [must abide by certain rules](#), as LockBit appears to do, such as never crypto-locking systems in Russia. In some cases, groups may also be called on to do favors for the government.

Customer Focus

LockBit takes pains to appeal to affiliates via a dedicated page on its site. "The page is peppered with people-pleasing language designed to signal the gang's trustworthiness and willingness to listen," says cybersecurity firm [Malwarebytes](#).

As LockBit tells prospective affiliates: "If you do not find one of your favorite features, please inform us, maybe we will add it especially for you."

The group clearly trades on its reputation. "We have shown everyone that it is safe to cooperate with us," it says. "We have never cheated anyone and always fulfill our agreements."

Such claims stand in stark contrast to some other, former ransomware bigwigs, such as the now-defunct [REvil](#) - aka Sodinokibi - operation. Reverse engineers working for the Exploit cybercrime forum last year discovered that REvil's developers had [added a backdoor](#) to the crypto-locking malware, enabling them to cut out affiliates and negotiate directly with victims. Presumably, affiliates were never told these victims had paid a ransom, since every ransom went first to the operators.

LockBit Affiliates Keep 80%

From a business standpoint, LockBit seems to have organized its operations to avoid any question that it would try or be able to run such scams. For starters, while many groups' operators handle communications with victims, LockBit instead has affiliates do so.

"You personally communicate with the attacked companies and decide yourself how much money to take for your invaluable pentest work, which should surely be generously paid," LockBit tells affiliates, noting that whatever price they set, LockBit gets a 20% cut of every ransom paid.

	<p>Affiliates are instructed to transfer to LockBit its cut after any ransom payment, except for any ransom payments that exceed \$500,000. In that case, to avoid LockBit operators getting scammed, "you give the attacked company two wallets for payment - one is yours, to which the company will transfer 80%, and the second is ours for 20%," LockBit says.</p> <p>If prospective affiliates think that LockBit keeping 20% is too much, the operators offer this self-serving advice: "You should not deny yourself the pleasure of working with us. Just increase the amount of ransom by 20% and be happy."</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	07/28 Health records breached 2022: 22M so far
SOURCE	https://www.itsecurityguru.org/2022/07/28/22-million-us-health-records-breached-thus-far-in-2022/?web_view=true
GIST	<p>A new report from GlobalData estimates that up to 22 million US health records have been breached so far in 2022.</p> <p>The same report forecasts that spending on cybersecurity in the global healthcare industry will increase by nearly \$400 million in the next 3 years.</p> <p>This increase is sorely needed in a sprawling industry which is so often behind the times in terms of information security. The health care industry is often a prime target of ransomware attacks as they store valuable and confidential information on their customers.</p> <p>Included in this collection is not only names, date of births and medical record numbers but also private health information (PHI) which can include one's medical history, address, email addresses, and social security numbers.</p> <p>Using this information, threat actors can design a number of phishing schemes to target patients for further exploitation. Unlike credit card information or personal identification information, medical history cannot be changed, making it much more valuable on the black market.</p> <p>Over 41 million individuals in the US alone were affected by healthcare data breaches in 2021, according to reports of breaches affecting 500 individuals or more by the US Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Office of Civil Rights</p> <p>The largest presently known breach for 2022 so far was the breach at Shields Health Care Group, which affected as many as two million individuals.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	07/28 Detroit city retirees' data breach concern
SOURCE	https://www.fox2detroit.com/news/city-of-detroit-retirees-data-breach-causes-concern/?web_view=true
GIST	<p>DETROIT (FOX 2) - There is a new warning about an alleged data breach affecting some City of Detroit retirees. Personal information including Social Security Numbers appear to have been exposed online.</p> <p>"I'm just worried about people having their Social Security out on the dark web and people buying cars, homes and all that kind of thing," said Kathleen Weldon.</p> <p>And you would be concerned too, if you found your co-workers' personal information as well as your own on what's supposed to be a secure platform.</p> <p>It's what Weldon, a Detroit retiree, stumbled upon Wednesday morning after setting up her account on the City of Detroit retirement system's new online program.</p>

"I saw several links called lists, and I clicked on one - and it was my name and this first list was eight pages - my name and several other people," she said. "Some of them I knew, some of them I didn't know. It was their name and it was their Social Security Number."

Weldon says there were at least 10 other links with retirees' personal information under the documents page. She showed FOX 2 the redacted list of her fellow retirees' personal information and we took the extra precaution of obscuring it further.

She told the retirement system about those lists and they were later taken down, but the damage may have already been done.

"This is some of the worst type of information that you don't want falling into the wrong hands," said David Derigiotis. "If you're able to tie an individual's name with their Social Security Number, which really is the crown jewel for identity in terms of taking loans, taking out credit, whatever it may be, under somebody's name, that's it."

Derigiotis is a cyber-security expert and says oftentimes in data breaches a company unintentionally shares sensitive information.

He says the retirement system for the City of Detroit or RSCD would do well to conduct a forensic analysis.

"They have to take a look at how long was this information displayed online," he said. "How many clicks, how many visitors did we have to the site? how many eyeballs were looking at it? did anybody copy and download that information? they really have to go into damage control."

FOX 2 contacted RSCD Wednesday night. Thursday morning, the RSCD said the breach affected "only 68 people" and was in a "secure portal that only employees and retirees have credentialed access to."

"Someone definitely dropped the ball," said Weldon. "How do you launch a new system and not check for things like this?"

David Derigiotis suggests putting a freeze on your credit with all of the credit bureaus, and to look at any open credit lines you have, to see if anyone has created a loan in your name - and possibly getting a fraud alert on top of it. and watch out for any unusual activity.

(UPDATE 7/28): The General Retirement System released a statement regarding the incident.

A spokesperson said that a forensic analysis concluded that Weldon was the only person to click on the information, the person responsible for the mistake was identified and "corrective action" was taken.

"No one else has clicked on the information (according to forensic analysis)," the statement said. "(There were) multiple duplicates of same individuals (on the list), many of whom are deceased."

Identity theft monitoring will be provided to the retirees, it added.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	07/28 IPFS: the new hotbed of phishing
SOURCE	https://www.trustwave.com/en-us/resources/blogs/spiderlabs-blog/ipfs-the-new-hotbed-of-phishing/?&web_view=true
GIST	A few months ago, we reported on an interesting site called the Chameleon Phishing Page . These websites have the capability to change their background and logo depending on the user's domain. The phishing site is stored in IPFS (InterPlanetary File System) and after reviewing the URLs used by the attacker, we noticed an increasing number of phishing emails containing IPFS URLs as their payload.

We have observed more than 3,000 emails containing phishing URLs that have utilized IPFS for the past 90 days and it is evident that IPFS is increasingly becoming a popular platform for phishing websites.

What's with IPFS and why do attackers use it?

IPFS was created in 2015 and is a distributed, peer-to-peer file-sharing system for storing and accessing files, websites, applications, and data. Contents are available through peers located worldwide, who might be transferring information, storing it, or doing both. IPFS can locate a file using its content address rather than its location. To be able to access a piece of content, users need a gateway hostname and the content identifier (CID) of the file.

https://<Gateway>/ipfs/<CID Hash>

Currently, most data is transferred across the internet using Hypertext Transfer Protocol (HTTP) which employs a centralized client-server approach. IPFS, on the other hand, is a project that aims to create a completely decentralized web that works through a P2P network.

With the IPFS configuration, shared files are distributed to other machines acting as nodes throughout the networked file system; hence it can be accessed whenever needed. The file is retrieved from any participating node on the network that has the requested content.

In a centralized network, data is not accessible if the server is down or if a link gets broken. Whereas with IPFS, data is persistent. Naturally, this extends to the malicious content stored in the network. Taking down phishing content stored on IPFS can be difficult because even if it is removed in one node, it may still be available on other nodes.

Another thing to consider is the difficulty of discovering malicious traffic in a legitimate P2P network. With data persistence, robust network, and little regulation, IPFS is perhaps an ideal platform for attackers to host and share malicious content.

How do we identify IPFS URLs?

As mentioned earlier, a CID is a label that is used to point to content in an IPFS network. Instead of location-based addressing, data is requested using the hash of that content. IPFS uses sha-256 hashing algorithm by default.

The CID version 0 of IPFS was first designed to use base 58-encoded multihashes as the content identifiers. Version 0 starts with "Qm" and has a length of 46 characters.

However, in the latest CID v1 it contains some leading identifiers that clarify exactly which representation is used, along with the content-hash itself. It includes a decoding algorithm links to existing software implementations for decoding CIDs.

The subdomain gateways convert paths with custom bases like base16 to base32 or base36, in an effort to fit a CID in a DNS label:

Sample URL:

dweb[.]link/ipfs/f01701220c3c4733ec8affd06cf9e9ff50ffc6bcd2ec85a6170004bb709669c31de91a 439

returns a HTTP 301 redirect:

bafybeigdyrzt5sfp7udm7hu76uh7y26nf3efuylqabf3oclgty55fbzdi[.]ipfs[.]dweb[.]link

IPFS links usually have a common format of:

- `https://ipfs[.]io/ipfs/{46 random character string}?{filename|key}={random character string}`
- `https://ipfs[.]io/ipfs/{46 random character string}?filename={file name}.html &emailtoken={email address}`
- `https://ipfs[.]io/ipfs/{46 random character string}#{user email address}`

Different Avenues of IPFS Phishing

Multiple services are available for storing files in an IPFS network. Cyber attackers have taken advantage of these services and they are now being used in phishing campaigns. Here are some of the IPFS phishing websites that we have observed and their URL behavior.

Blockchain Services - infura[.]io

Common URL format:

hxxp://{59 character string}.ipfs.infura-ipfs.io/?filename={file name}.html/

Google Services - googleweblight[.]com

Common URL format:

http://googleweblight[.]com/i?u={IPFS URL redirection}

Abused Cloud Storage Services

1. **Filebase[.]jio**

Common URL format:

hxxps://ipfs[.]filebase.io/ipfs/{59 random character string}

2. **Nftstorage[.]link**

Common URL formats:

hxxps://nftstorage[.]link/ipfs/{59 random character string}/#{target email address}

hxxps://{59 random character string}.ipfs.nftstorage[.]link/#{target email address}

Conclusion

Phishing techniques have taken a leap by utilizing the concept of decentralized cloud services using IPFS.

One of the main reasons why IPFS has become a new playground for phishing is that many web hosting, file storage or cloud services are now offering IPFS services. This means that there's more flexibility for the phishers in creating new types of phishing URLs. In addition, the spammers can easily camouflage their activities by hosting their content in a legitimate web hosting services or use multiple URL redirection techniques to help thwart scanners using URL reputation or automated URL analysis.

[Return to Top](#)

Terror Conditions

[Top of page](#)

HEADLINE	07/28 Al Shabab attempted Ethiopia invasion?
SOURCE	https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2022/07/puzzles-deepen-in-the-context-of-shabaabs-attempted-ethiopian-invasion.php
GIST	<p>Last weekend, Shabaab, al Qaeda's branch in East Africa, attempted to mount a sizable incursion into Ethiopian territory. The foray lasted at least three days, with possibly hundreds of Shabaab militants involved, before regional troops from Ethiopia's Somali State fought the jihadists back into Somalia.</p> <p>Over the last few days, however, new information has come to light that warrants further discussion of Shabaab's raids and the possible intentions of its incursions. This includes a purported second attempt by Shabaab to mount a concerted raid into Ethiopia.</p> <p>Independent reporting has focused on Shabaab's attempts to establish its own frontline inside Ethiopia, while Ethiopian officials and media continue to double-down on Shabaab's alleged links with the ethnic Oromo insurgent group, the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA).</p> <p>On July 21, at least 500 Shabaab militants first entered Ethiopian territory after a separate unit of Shabaab's forces attacked the Somali border towns of Aato and Yeed the previous day. The two towns</p>

hosted bases of the Liyu Police, an [ethnic Somali paramilitary force](#) used by Ethiopia inside both Somali State and Somalia itself.

According to Harun Maruf of *Voice of America*, the strikes on the Liyu Police bases [were meant as a diversionary tactic](#) meant to allow the larger Shabaab force time and space to mount the incursion into Ethiopia itself. Shabaab's propaganda [has solely focused](#) on the attacks on the Liyu Police.

This includes an [open declaration of war](#) made against the Liyu Police by Shabaab's shadow governor of Somalia's Bakool Region, Osman Abu Abdi Rahman, just days after the battles. [Fu'ad Mohamed Khalaf](#), one of Shabaab's top leaders, [also recently denounced the Liyu Police](#) after visiting Aato, which Shabaab says it still controls.

These initial raids marked a rare occasion as only a handful of Shabaab attacks [have been recorded inside Ethiopia](#) itself since 2007. Shabaab has made Ethiopia a prime target within its propaganda since the country first intervened against the group in 2006. It has thus [tried on numerous occasions](#) to mount terrorist attacks inside Ethiopia, though the plots have all largely been thwarted or have failed on their own.

Regional forces from Ethiopia's Somali State eventually stopped the militants in their progression, [reportedly killing around 100 jihadists](#). While this number cannot be independently verified, the United States Africa Command [has confirmed that the militants were able](#) to penetrate as much as 150km into Ethiopian territory.

It is unclear if other Shabaab militants remain that deep inside Ethiopia. The purported direction the militants were heading, however, presents several interesting developments.

According to Horn of Africa analyst Matt Bryden, Shabaab's plan [was to make it to Ethiopia's Bale Mountain](#) range in the country's Oromia State. It should be noted that Bale is more than double the distance from the border than the 150km incursion cited by US Africa Command.

Shabaab members were reportedly [arrested inside Oromia's Bale Zone](#) earlier this year, though it is unclear to what extent – if any – those militants played in Shabaab's attempts to erect a base of operations in the mountains.

The Bale Mountains, which are situated in Ethiopia's southeast, are already host to another insurgent group, the aforementioned Oromo Liberation Army. The OLA is an ethnic Oromo militant group fighting for autonomy or even independence for Ethiopia's Oromia State and is mobilized by secular nationalism.

Second incursion and more allegations of Shabaab aiding Oromo nationalists

It is through this context that Ethiopian officials continue to double-down on the contention that Shabaab was attempting to aid the OLA. After Shabaab's initial three-day incursion was pushed back, official's from Ethiopia's Somali State [remarked that the jihadist group was attempting to link up](#) with the OLA.

This line was again repeated earlier this week when Shabaab reportedly attempted to mount a second concerted raid into Ethiopia. According to Somali State officials, the jihadists [again entered Ethiopian territory on July 25](#) through the Ferfer district of the Somali State's Shabelle Zone, which borders Somalia's Hiraaan and Galguduud regions.

Much like the first incursion of last week, Somali State officials reported its forces beat the jihadists back, with at least [85 additional Shabaab militants](#) being killed in the second attempted incursion.

Somali State officials then again stated that this second attempted incursion [was meant to also link up with](#) the OLA in Oromia.

This is unlikely to be the case. While Shabaab most likely has ethnic Oromo members within its ranks, the OLA, as previously stated, is a secular Oromo nationalist group and employs no religious rhetoric. It

explicitly [aligns with other ethno-nationalist insurgent groups](#), most notably the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), all of which are also secular nationalists.

Salafi militancy has remained a marginal force within Ethiopia's complicated militant landscape, which has always primarily organized itself along ethno-nationalist lines.

There is also historical precedent for Shabaab rejecting secular insurgencies inside Ethiopia. When accused in 2014 of working alongside the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF), an ethnic Somali insurgent group in Ethiopia's Somali State, Shabaab [explicitly stated](#) it views such organizations as "un-Islamic" and therefore unworthy of its support.

Moreover, Bale has long served as an important area in the history of armed Oromo nationalism, as the [site of a major revolt](#) – amounting to the first armed Oromo uprising – in the 1960s against the imperial government of Emperor Haile Salassie. In this 1970s and 80s, the original Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) began in [West Hararghe](#) and was concentrated in eastern Oromia and Bale.

Though armed action by the OLA in Bale Zone remains less frequent than in nearby Guji Zone – where the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project recorded at least 30 clashes since the beginning of the year – it is unlikely that the OLA would willingly tolerate the presence of the al Qaeda branch in its claimed territory.

Furthermore, the OLA has been [repeatedly accused of staging violent attacks](#) on Amhara civilians elsewhere in Ethiopia – [though the OLA has repeatedly denied responsibility and instead blames the Ethiopian government](#) – and it is unlikely that it would risk further damage to its international legitimacy by forging ties with a group like Shabaab.

Raising further questions are reports that ethnic Somali militiamen unaffiliated to Shabaab have [staged a series of attacks on Oromo civilians in Bale's Gura Damole district](#) over the preceding two months, resulting in the displacement of 1038 households in June.

Longstanding tensions over land had previously resulted in a [series of bloody attacks by Oromo and Somali paramilitaries in both Oromia and Somali regions in 2016 and 2017](#), killing hundreds and displacing hundreds of thousands.

Further, the Liyu Police, the same paramilitary group attacked by Shabaab on July 20 inside Somalia, was [blamed in July 2018 for killing at least 98 Oromo civilians in the Bale Zone during the 2016-2017 violence](#) by the Ethiopian government's Human Rights Commission, in addition to attacks in other parts of Oromia's border with Somali region.

It is possible that Shabaab may attempt to capitalize on inter-ethnic violence in the border areas between Oromia and Somali region, though the degree to which Shabaab is cognizant of these issues or capable of taking advantage of them is unclear.

It also remains unclear how Shabaab might entrench itself in Bale given the presence of hostile Oromo and Somali paramilitary groups engaged in active violence against civilians, the government, and each other.

Shabaab are no supporters of the Liyu Police (or the aforementioned ONLF) and are unlikely to work alongside them inside Ethiopia, though other Somali paramilitary groups inside Ethiopia may elicit different feelings for Shabaab.

It is possible that Shabaab could take a more proactive role in the future, though, provided it actually establishes a firm presence inside Ethiopia.

Ethiopia in the sights of Shabaab's regional expansion

Nevertheless, it is much more likely that Shabaab views the Bale Mountains as a suitable area for it to base its units in order to launch a more sustained pace of attacks inside Ethiopia itself, separate from the indigenous conflicts taking place in the area.

Indeed, a former Shabaab member [quoted by Harun Maruf](#) stated that “the group’s plan is to erect their black flag inside Ethiopia.”

Especially in Somalia’s northern region of Puntland – and to a lesser extent [in northeastern Somaliland](#) – Shabaab has found refuge in the Bari and Golis Mountains.

The remote and rugged terrain provides enough sanctuary for the group to [mount attacks inside](#) Puntland [and occasional excursions](#) into Somaliland – the latter of [which has also been helped](#) by pro-Shabaab members of the Warsangali, a minority Darod sub-clan inside northeastern Somaliland.

It is thus much more likely Shabaab is attempting to replicate this model for Ethiopia’s Bale Mountains for its own purposes – effectively striking inside its longstanding enemy of Ethiopia – than assisting an ethnic Oromo insurgent group.

Much like with some elements of the Warsangali in northeastern Somaliland, it is possible that Shabaab could cultivate some friendly ties with local Somali clans in eastern Ethiopia. Though this remains to be seen.

The impact and implications of Shabaab’s two attempted incursions into Ethiopian territory are still being uncovered.

However, the two concerted efforts within the span of a week demonstrate Shabaab’s growing ambition, regional capabilities, and opportunism to exploit regional geopolitics, especially as the Abiy Ahmed government struggles to contain the various insurgencies inside Ethiopia.

These raids also come as Shabaab has made it a point to intensify its attacks inside northeastern Kenya. In just the last week alone, the group has claimed authorship for at least five attacks in Kenya’s Mandera and Garissa Counties, according to data compiled by *FDD’s Long War Journal*.

Meanwhile, in southern Somalia, at least 13 people [were killed a suicide bombing](#) in the town of Merca yesterday. Those killed included the town’s mayor. At least 19 suicide bombings conducted by Shabaab have been recorded this year, according to data kept by *FDD’s Long War Journal*.

As Shabaab continues to resurge inside various parts of Somalia, it also continues to expand its violence across East Africa. Much like with the violence inside Kenya, the recent incursions into Ethiopia are part of this expansion project.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	07/29 Australia charges man with terror support
SOURCE	https://www.smh.com.au/national/queensland/alleged-brisbane-extremist-charged-with-encouraging-terrorist-attack-20220729-p5b5q9.html
GIST	<p>An Australian man already accused of funding an overseas fighter to travel to Syrian to join terrorist groups battling government forces, has also been charged with advocating for a terrorism act.</p> <p>Omar Saghir, 40, was arrested on July 16, 2019, by Australian Federal Police officers when he landed at Sydney Airport from Saudi Arabia, where he had been since 2019.</p> <p>The AFP allege Saghir played a senior role in a Brisbane group that held a “religiously motivated violent extremist ideology” and a desire to travel to Syria to fight.</p>

	<p>Saghir has also been accused of co-founding an organisation that provided funds to people who later fled Australia to join Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, a group fighting against Syrian government forces.</p> <p>Saghir is accused of transferred \$1010 on August 8, 2013, to ‘Witness 1’ – who was in Turkey, but later went to Syria and fought against government forces.</p> <p>Witness 1 has provided a full statement to the AFP against Saghir, including details of conversations they had.</p> <p>These allegedly included discussions of ‘jihad’, providing Syrian anti-government fighters with “men and armaments” and asking the Mujahideen militant group to help with the fight in Syria.</p> <p>Saghir is also accused of posting videos to his Facebook account in mid-2019 showing the fighting in Syria and encouraging followers to join and support the cause.</p> <p>He was extradited to Queensland and charged with one count of making preparations for incursions into foreign states to engage in hostile activities. The maximum penalty is 10 years imprisonment.</p> <p>Saghir has also been charged with willful damage and breaching his bail conditions.</p> <p>On Friday, Saghir was further charged in Brisbane Magistrates Court with “intentionally advocating for the doing of a terrorism act” between March 12, 2019 and February 22, 2020.</p> <p>He remains in prison and did not enter a plea to the new charge.</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	07/28 Domestic violent extremism threat
SOURCE	https://www.voanews.com/a/us-official-threat-of-domestic-violent-extremism-remains-elevated-/6678204.html https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/news/justice/doj-sheds-light-rise-domestic-terrorism-cases
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON — The threat of domestic violent extremism in the United States remains high, a top U.S. Justice Department official said on Thursday, brushing aside Republican accusations that the FBI is inflating the number of cases for political reasons.</p> <p>"What I can tell you is that the intelligence community has assessed that the threat we face from domestic violent extremism is elevated, and that is consistent with what we see," Matthew Olsen, assistant attorney general of the National Security Division, said during a House Judiciary Committee hearing.</p> <p>Olsen's comments came after Representative Jim Jordan, the top Republican on the panel, asserted that "multiple whistleblowers" had approached House Judiciary Republicans, alleging that FBI officials were pressuring field agents to categorize cases as domestic violent extremism, even though they did not meet the criteria for such classification.</p> <p>"Are you juicing the numbers?" Jordan asked.</p> <p>Olsen responded that he was not aware of the accusations.</p> <p>Jordan, one of the most outspoken critics of a congressional investigation into the January 6, 2021, Capitol riot, first made the allegations Wednesday in a letter to FBI Director Christopher Wray. In it, he alleged that FBI agents were "bolstering the number of cases of DVEs to satisfy their superiors" and demanded documents and information related to the investigations.</p> <p>"According to whistleblowers, the FBI uses these metrics to dispense awards and promotions," Jordan wrote. "Every whistleblower has called it an environment of 'pressure' within the FBI."</p> <p>The FBI did not respond to a request for comment on Jordan's allegations.</p>

The FBI defines domestic violent extremists, or DVEs, as "individuals who commit violent criminal acts in furtherance of ideological goals."

The FBI tracks several categories of domestic violent extremists. White supremacists and anti-government militias have been responsible for most deadly attacks in recent years.

In his prepared testimony, Olsen said FBI investigations of domestic violent extremism cases have more than doubled since 2020.

Hundreds of these cases stemmed from the January 6, 2021, mob attack on the U.S. Capitol. The FBI is investigating the attack as "domestic terrorism."

Last September, Wray told lawmakers that the number of active domestic violent terrorism cases had jumped from about 1,000 in early 2020 to 2,700, while the number of so-called homegrown violent extremist cases remained stable, at around 1,000.

To date, federal prosecutors have charged more than 860 people in connection with the January 6 attack. More than 350 people have been convicted or pleaded guilty to various charges.

The [Justice Department](#) shed light on the reasons behind the doubling of domestic terrorism cases since early 2020, with a top DOJ official saying prosecutions related to the Capitol riot make up "at least a significant portion of that jump."

Matt Olsen, the assistant attorney general in charge of DOJ's National Security Division, [told](#) the House Judiciary Committee on Thursday that "the number of FBI investigations of suspected domestic violent extremism has more than doubled since the spring of 2020."

He [revealed](#) much of that rise is due to prosecutions of those involved in the events of Jan. 6, 2021.

Rep. Jamie Raskin (D-MD), a member of the House select committee investigating the Capitol riot, asked Olsen if the jump in domestic terrorism investigations has led to a jump in indictments, excluding Jan. 6 prosecutions.

"I don't have a specific number on that, congressman, because that number, that jump, doubling, that number does include the Jan. 6 cases, and there, of course, we have over 800 arrests of individuals — not all of them are characterized as domestic violent extremists, to be clear, but many are, and those do account for at least a significant portion of that jump over the past two years in the number of investigations," Olsen replied.

Attorney General Merrick Garland [compared](#) the Capitol Riot to the Oklahoma City bombing of 1995 when unveiling the Justice Department's response to the Biden administration's new anti-domestic terrorism strategy last June.

DOJ [said](#) this week that more than 850 defendants have been arrested in relation to the Capitol riot, including over 260 charged with assaulting or impeding law enforcement. Members of the [Proud Boys](#) and [Oath Keepers](#) have been hit with seditious conspiracy charges and have pleaded not guilty.

Olsen told Rep. Val Demings (D-FL) that Jan. 6 "stands apart" and "represents now the single largest domestic terrorism investigation in the nation's history."

Olsen [announced](#) the creation of a new "domestic terrorism unit" in January.

	<p>Since the May leak of a draft of the Supreme Court’s opinion overturning <i>Roe v. Wade</i>, there have been heightened threats against Supreme Court justices and anti-abortion advocates, including attacks and vandalism targeting activist groups, pregnancy centers, and churches across the country. Republicans have repeatedly pressed Garland on investigating these attacks as domestic terrorism.</p> <p>Olsen told Rep. Steve Chabot (R-OH) that the FBI has opened cases involving those attacks and threats, some of which have been opened as "domestic violent extremist cases."</p> <p>In his opening statement, Olsen said the threat posed by domestic violent extremism is rising, pointing to attacks in Buffalo, Pittsburgh, El Paso, and Charlottesville, as well as the 2017 shooting during a Republican practice session of the Congressional Baseball Game.</p> <p>The FBI admitted in May 2021 that the 2017 shooting that nearly killed Rep. Steve Scalise (R-LA) had been classified as “domestic terrorism.” The bureau had previously classified it as “suicide by cop.”</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	07/28 ‘Huge potential’ for terror on rail lines
SOURCE	https://www.hstoday.us/featured/huge-potential-for-terror-on-rail-lines-touted-in-accelerationist-attack-tutorial/
GIST	<p>An accelerationist guide that includes more than 30 pages of tactical advice on attacking various critical infrastructure sectors led with pointers for violent extremists to hit key rail lines with the aim of derailling cars, causing death and damage, and disabling vital routes.</p> <p>The 261-page guide claiming to be the product of 100 authors and circulated among extremist channels on Telegram is a mix of ideological declarations and tactical advice combining accelerationism, neo-Nazism, and ecofascism while at its core attempting to drive extremists to commit violent acts — including against critical infrastructure and communities of color — in order to hasten societal downfall and benefit white supremacists.</p> <p>The document includes a call for mass shootings of migrants in an effort to deter undocumented immigration, suggestions to infiltrate facilities providing abortion services with the aim of attacking staff or patients, threats for acts of mass violence against crowded venues, declaring that “memorials are our monuments” in praise of mass shooters whom they refer to as “saints,” a call to emulate the 2016 mass shooting at the Pulse nightclub in order to strike the LGBTQ community, and more.</p> <p>On one page of the document, an “educator” muses that “some guy was telling me quick dry cement is EXTREMELY effective for derailling trains.” A “pupil” responds that “one guy could build a mold to make tiny concrete ramps quickly and repeatedly on all of the tracks in a junction.”</p> <p>Trains lead a lengthy section deeper in the guide about how to target various infrastructure — followed by cell towers; trucks and depots; roads, bridges and highways; water treatment and distribution; commercial business; communications; electrical systems; and HVAC systems — penned by an anonymous “saboteur” who writes, “I have not committed all of the acts discussed in this guide, but if it’s in the lineup then I definitely know someone who has, and consulted them heavily before putting anything here.”</p> <p>“Aside from death, this type of sabotage has huge potential of economic ramifications, causing delays, and imposing terror toward corporate entities involved in this industry,” the guide states, adding that they’re aiming for two types of impact: “the suffering your target will withstand, including the cost associated with restoring itself,” and “the heightened security on the local and national level in reaction to the demonstrable damage that can be done toward this target.”</p> <p>Encouraged to look for “gaps in the enemy’s shields,” accelerationists are advised to consider surveillance technologies being used to protect trains and tracks including drones, what types of surveillance technology and/or guards are deployed, how long it would take local law enforcement to arrive at the scene, how accessible the targeted area is, and how noticeable certain forms of attack are.</p>

As far as tactics, the author first discusses ways to tamper with junction boxes and then tracks, advocating that the attacker get familiarized with the rail system and choke points in order to “strike long-distance hauling track” and use a VPN when doing online research to “protect yourself in as many ways as possible.” A personal GPS device was suggested to pinpoint track locations while cell phones were discouraged.

Track sabotage tactics discussed included fire as a weapon, digging around tracks and ties, disassembling rail and tie attachments, and deforming the tracks with thermite, which is called “a simple tool that every saboteur should be capable of making whether they have access to advanced tools and materials or not.” The guide also discusses blocking tracks with bulky or strategically placed objects and tampering with rail switches.

The document advocates attacks not just on rail infrastructure but on the trains themselves, targeting brakes or the couplers between rail cars.

The article shows map portions with rail lines highlighted on various spots along the U.S.-Canada border: Sault Ste. Marie; Niagara Falls; Montreal; Quebec; Detroit/Windsor; Sarnia, Ontario; International Falls, Minn.; the Longworth crossing in Minnesota; the Portal crossing in North Dakota; the Pembina crossing in North Dakota; the Sweet Grass crossing in Montana; the Eastport crossing in Idaho; and Vancouver. The guide encourages similar research by extremists and attacks along these trade routes “to cause real and long term economic damage to a region.”

The cover story for a 2017 issue of al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula’s *Inspire* magazine was train derailment operations, with a recipe for a derailment tool, an illustrated timeline of devastating derailments in America, and a map of passenger and freight rail lines belonging to Amtrak, Norfolk Southern, Union Pacific, BNSF and CSX lifted from the Department of Transportation.

As both ISIS and al-Qaeda have been highlighting terror attack methods that eschew suicide and leave the jihadist alive to conduct another attack, the *Inspire* issue stressed that targeting train tracks could be preferable to attacking train cars or populated stations.

“America’s railroads are estimated to be a 1/3 of the world’s railway. So how can they protect 240,000 km of railroad ... it is practically impossible. The same goes to Britain, with 18,500 km and France, with 29,473 km. It is a daunting and almost impossible task to protect the long railroad length, and yet one of the easiest to target. That may result to great damage and destruction on different levels,” al-Qaeda’s “Lone Jihad Guidance Team” wrote, adding that “it is time that we instill fear and make them impose strict security measures to trains as they did with their air transportation.”

“We have to expose more of their vulnerabilities in their security,” the writers added. “And when they spend millions of dollars to tackle a vulnerability we should be ready to open a new [front]... we expect that there will be no effective solution to the security gaps that may be caused by these types of operations that target the train system.”

AQAP was particularly interested in the popular Acela high-speed route running between D.C. and Boston, as well as discussing the Amtrak Cascades, the Coast Starlight, the Pacific Surfliner, the Palmetto line and more.

“This is the most suited condition for a successful train derail operation. When a train reaches high speed then it has to be reduced to around 100 km/h. This is because a train at a very high speed is hard to control or manage using brakes. For example America’s high-speed train ‘Acela’ requires a whole mile so that it can come to a halt, this is because of the train’s very high speed. Another reason is that the train losses weight and stability when it is at high speeds,” the article stated. “Therefore a Mujahid must be aware of areas where the train increases its speed and places where the train moves at a high speed.”

Even more effective, al-Qaeda argued, is a scenario “that makes the different security agencies sleepless” — if a jihadist could wage a complex “dual operation” attacking a train hauling hazardous materials through a well-populated area. “Observing and surveilling the movements of these Hazmat trains” was key, the magazine said, as well as tapping into open-source intelligence available from government agencies and other outlets in the U.S.

Step-by-step instructions showed jihadists how to make a “derailment tool” to clamp onto a track composed of concrete, rebar, sheet metal and rubber. A DHS official later told HSToday that the tool, as detailed in the pictorial open-source instructions, was assessed as not strong enough to be able to take a train off the tracks.

Still, would-be terrorists of all stripes have been experimenting with the recipes circulated in the public domain by al-Qaeda. Akayed Ullah, an ISIS supporter convicted in November of unsuccessfully trying to detonate a device in a New York City subway tunnel during the 2017 Christmas season, reportedly was reading *Inspire* and used Christmas lights in his pipe bomb; a 2015 al-Qaeda tutorial showed how to use a Christmas bulb to put a three-second delay on a pipe bomb explosion.

ISIS supporters have also included rail lines in their propaganda posters that urge lone jihadists toward specific methods or targets.

And the 2017 conviction of a D.C. transit officer — the first cop in the U.S. charged with attempting to support ISIS — underscored the potential of an insider threat at rail stations under protection.

Nicholas Young, 38, of Fairfax, Va., was a Metropolitan Area Transit Authority officer assigned to the Takoma Park station who tried to financially aid ISIS in 2016 and, previously, lied to investigators about an associate he believed had traveled to join ISIS; the Justice Department said Young schooled an FBI source “on how to evade law enforcement detection by utilizing specific travel methods and advised the [confidential human source] to watch out for informants and not discuss his plans with others.” He was sentenced to 15 years behind bars.

While soft targets from the El Paso Walmart to the Tops Friendly Markets in Buffalo have been hit by killers coupling mass shootings with their extremist manifestos, attacking critical infrastructure and deploying CBRN agents remain holy grails — dirty bombs were called exactly that in the 261-page accelerationist guide — for terrorists because of the potential for higher casualty counts and larger-scale disruption or chaos intended to further their goals.

Another [accelerationist handbook](#) that is 14 pages long and recently was being shared among extremist Telegram channels calls for shooters to bypass softer targets in favor of causing chaotic blackouts by emulating on a broader scale the unsolved 2013 sniper attack on a California transmission substation. The document refers to the power grid as “the main thing that keeps the anti-White system going” and calls power distribution substations “sitting ducks, worthy prey” that are “largely unprotected and often in remote locations,” setting the stage for a spree of attacks.

The guide theorizes that the power grid could be “crippled” over a large area if three similar substations were struck simultaneously or within days of each other with “armor piercing rounds,” arguing that with an extended blackout “all hell will break lose [sic]” and white supremacists would be poised to take control. Referencing the practice of extremists bestowing “sainthood” upon mass shooters who meet certain criteria, the document declares that an extremist who successfully attacks the power grid would be revered “above Sainthood when the lights don’t turn back on and we are plunged into urban warfare.”

The guide also mentions “telecommunications/Internet, oil transportation/pipelines, water lines, and similar things” as being prime targets because “they allow for all that we hate and despise” by supporting a diverse population.

[Return to Top](#)

SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/07/28/us/politics/gitmo-prisoner-torture-cia.html
GIST	<p>GUANTÁNAMO BAY, Cuba — A prisoner accused of plotting Al Qaeda’s bombing of the U.S.S. Cole warship in 2000 told federal interrogators years later that he was waterboarded by the C.I.A., an interpreter testified Thursday. But that detail was omitted from the official account of the interrogations that prosecutors want to use at his death-penalty trial as evidence that he confessed.</p> <p>At issue in the hearings is whether the military judge will accept a 34-page memo written by agents who questioned the prisoner, Abd al-Rahim al-Nashiri, at Guantánamo Bay for three days in early 2007. The account of the interrogation is considered critical trial evidence. Defense lawyers say it is tainted by torture and want it excluded.</p> <p>“He talked about the waterboarding,” said John J. Elkaliouby, who worked for the F.B.I. as an Arabic linguist from 1994 to 2015. “He said, ‘I was waterboarded by the C.I.A.,’ and I reported that to the whole team.”</p> <p>Mr. Elkaliouby was called as a prosecution witness to describe the mood and atmosphere during the interrogation, which he said was friendly, calm and “at the pleasure of Mr. Nashiri,” who was shackled at the ankles. The agents served tea and pastry, and the prisoner offered that he had been tortured.</p> <p>The linguist cast the revelation as a surprise. “I didn’t expect that, to be honest.”</p> <p>Testimony this week expanded on accounts that have emerged in the Sept. 11 case of how military prosecutors built death-penalty cases against men who were tortured during secret detention in overseas prisons run by the C.I.A., and then transferred to Guantánamo Bay in 2006 for trial by order of President George W. Bush.</p> <p>The C.I.A. had a secret role at Guantánamo in the detention and interrogations of the men by F.B.I. and Navy law enforcement agents, including collecting the notes from interrogations, Mr. Elkaliouby said. The C.I.A. required that the interrogators write their accounts of what they learned on agency computers, which were classified.</p> <p>Before the interrogations started in early 2007, the federal agents were instructed to omit allegations of torture and abuse from what was colloquially called “clean team memos” — and instead write a separate account.</p> <p>Defense lawyers have said they received copies of those separate accounts among classified documents prosecutors turned over to them in this pretrial phase. But it is impossible to know how the defendants raised the accusations because there are no recordings or transcripts of those interrogations.</p> <p>Seventeen U.S. sailors were killed in the suicide attack on the Cole during a refueling stop in Aden, Yemen, on Oct. 12, 2000. Although Mr. Nashiri was captured two years later and turned over to U.S. custody, he was not charged until 2011. The case has been mired in pretrial hearings for more than a decade as defense lawyers have struggled to obtain and use information about his torture to disqualify evidence.</p> <p>They also have argued that Mr. Nashiri, who is now 57 and has been diagnosed by U.S. military doctors as suffering post-traumatic stress disorder, emerged from C.I.A. detention in a state of “learned helplessness,” essentially trained to tell his U.S. captors what he believed they wanted to hear.</p> <p>He was waterboarded in Thailand in 2002 by psychologists who worked as C.I.A. contractors and was subjected to rectal abuse and threatened with a power drill and a gun during interrogations conducted by C.I.A. agents. For a time in late 2003 and early 2004, he was hidden at Guantánamo Bay in a C.I.A. black site near the prison facilities but out of reach of lawyers and the International Red Cross.</p> <p>That site is known as Camp Echo 2, and it was where Mr. Nashiri was held in 2004 and then in 2007 for the interrogations that prosecutors consider central to their case.</p>

Earlier Thursday, Bernard E. DeLury Jr., a retired Navy Reserve captain who is now a superior court judge in New Jersey, testified for prosecutors that on March 14, 2007, Mr. Nashiri was “alert,” “present” and not under distress during a hearing to review his status as an enemy combatant.

Judge DeLury presided at the two-hour [Combatant Status Review Tribunal](#), or C.S.R.T., during which, he said, he had “no doubt in my mind” that the prisoner’s participation was knowing and voluntary.

The process prohibited prisoners from having a lawyer, but Mr. Nashiri was assigned a Navy officer to act as a “personal representative,” speak on his behalf and help him respond to the allegations that the military said were sufficient to detain him as, essentially, a prisoner of the war against terrorism.

A defense lawyer, Capt. Brian L. Mizer of the Navy, asked Judge DeLury whether he knew that Mr. Nashiri had told his representative, who was called Lieutenant Commander X in court, that he was “afraid that he would be executed and dismembered at his C.S.R.T.”

Judge DeLury replied: “If he had told me that, I certainly would have explored that with him.”

[Return to Top](#)

Suspicious, Unusual

[Top of page](#)

HEADLINE	07/29 Mystery in couple's ID theft case
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/texas-honolulu-government-and-politics-685756de54ccb1ad14003bdf350710e7
GIST	<p>HONOLULU (AP) — Bobby Edward Fort was 27 when he enlisted in the Coast Guard in 1994 and retired 22 years later with a secret security clearance that allowed him to land a job in Honolulu as a defense contractor.</p> <p>But in reality, Bobby Fort was long dead. He was just short of 3 months old when he choked and died in a Texas hospital in 1967.</p> <p>The Bobby Fort who enlisted in the Coast Guard had stolen the dead baby’s identity 35 years ago. A false birth certificate helped him get five passports, drivers’ licenses and Department of Defense credentials.</p> <p>The fraud was uncovered last week. On Thursday, the man authorities said had posed as Fort was before a judge, who asked him to state his name: “Walter Glenn Primrose,” the 66-year-old said.</p> <p>Primrose was ordered held without bail by a U.S. District Court judge after a prosecutor provided new details about how he and his wife had been fraudulently living for decades under the stolen identities of two dead Texas infants.</p> <p>While the hearing further deepened the mystery of why the couple shed their past, it provided little clarity about whether the case against them goes beyond stolen identity, though a prosecutor suggested it could have ties overseas.</p> <p>“We think the defendant is obviously quite adept at impersonating other people, obtaining government ID documents, fraud, avoiding detection,” Assistant U.S. Attorney Wayne Myers said. “He may — we’re not saying for sure — but he may have some troubling foreign connections. And if he does, he might be able to use those to enlist help.”</p> <p>A search of the couple’s Hawaii home turned up faded Polaroids of the two wearing jackets that appear to be authentic Russian KGB uniforms, Myers said. An expert determined the snapshots were taken in the 1980s.</p>

The search also yielded an invisible ink kit, documents with coded language and maps showing military bases, Myers said.

When the couple were left in a room together, they were recorded saying “things consistent with espionage,” Myers said.

Federal defender Craig Jerome said the government only provided “speculation and innuendo” that the couple was involved in something more nefarious than “purely white-collar nonviolent offenses.”

“If it wasn’t for the speculation that the government’s injected into these proceedings without providing any real evidence ... he would certainly be released,” Jerome said.

Prosecutors feared Primrose would flee if freed. They noted in court papers that he was an avionics electrical technician in the Coast Guard and was highly skilled to communicate secretly if released.

U.S. Magistrate Judge Rom Trader said he based his detention order on the alleged fraud “over multiple occasions spanning a long period of time.”

Morrison faces a bail hearing Tuesday.

Her lawyer said the couple — regardless of the names they used — had lived law-abiding lives. Attorney Megan Kau told The Associated Press the couple posed for photos in the purported KGB jacket for fun.

“She wants everyone to know she’s not a spy,” Kau said. “This has all been blown way out of proportion. It’s government overreaching.”

The couple’s story begins in Texas, where Primrose and Gwynn Darle Morrison went to high school and college together and married in 1980, according to court documents.

In the early 1980s, they told family they were going into the witness protection program before abruptly abandoning their house and leaving Texas, Myers said. They handed over the keys to their Nacogdoches home and told family members to take anything they wanted. The house was later foreclosed on.

When they reemerged they had new names and different explanations of what happened.

In 1987, Primrose took on the identity of Fort, an infant who died in 1967 in Burnet, Texas. Morrison took the identity of Julie Lyn Montague, who died in 1968 at the same hospital as Fort. Primrose and Morrison, both born in 1955, were more than a decade older than the birth dates listed on their new IDs.

“The defendant and his wife reportedly told yet other associates that they needed to change their names because of legal and financial reasons,” Myers said. “And that going forward they can be contacted using their new names, Fort and Montague.”

At some point, Primrose told someone he was a government agent and couldn’t share photos of himself.

The couple remarried under their assumed names in 1988, according to court records.

Primrose had a longstanding interest in espionage, Myers said. His wife had anti-government and anti-military sentiments and was said by an associate to live in Romania when it was part of the communist bloc.

Kau denied that Morrison ever lived in Romania.

The couple, who were arrested Friday at their Kapolei home, are charged with conspiracy to commit an offense against the U.S., false statement in passport application and aggravated identity theft. They face up to 17 years in prison if convicted of all charges.

	<p>Inside their house, investigators discovered correspondence in which an associate believed Primrose had joined the CIA or had become a terrorist, Myers said.</p> <p>Morrison used her real name to open a post office box, where she told family to contact her. When her father died, her family couldn't reach her and enlisted local law enforcement to track her down.</p> <p>"Even the defendant's family cannot find him when they need to," Myers said.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	07/28 Officers: ICE can't find border jumpers
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/jul/28/ice-plan-track-down-border-jumpers-was-complete-wa/
GIST	<p>The Biden administration's attempt to track down catch-and-release illegal immigrants and serve them with court summonses turned into a "complete waste of time," according to officers who say they were pulled off higher priority cases to chase down "ghosts."</p> <p>Out of a universe of more than 30,000 potential targets, officers were able to locate and serve only about 600, according to U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement sources.</p> <p>That means tens of thousands of illegal border crossers remain at large in the country without an official Notice to Appear for their immigration proceedings — and there are no good prospects for tracking them down.</p> <p>Officers who spoke to The Washington Times said the agency should have known the operation was doomed because the migrants had given bogus addresses to authorities when they were caught at the border.</p> <p>Also, the migrants haven't been in the U.S. long enough to generate phone or utility records that would allow them to be tracked down.</p> <p>"I haven't went on one where there was a person at the house where they said they would be," one West Coast officer said. "It seems like this administration is trying to find busy work to keep us from actually arresting people."</p> <p>"I've got child molesters, I've got aggravated felons, I've got more important people to go after," said an officer who works the southern part of the country.</p> <p>"There were plenty of good cases that we've had to push to the side because, on a weekly basis, we had to go out and try to do something with these cases," said an officer who works on the East Coast. "It was basically three months of at least going out weekly when there were plenty of cases that were definitely more of a public safety consideration that we couldn't work."</p> <p>The Washington Times contacted ICE multiple times for this article, but the agency did not comment.</p> <p>The Times revealed the at-large operation in April. At that time, ICE called it a "law enforcement sensitive" matter but said the migrants targeted counted as enforcement priorities under Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas' framework.</p> <p>Officers counter that the operation was a distraction, leaving them chasing "ghosts" instead of going after the big cases Mr. Mayorkas said he wanted.</p> <p>"They say they have us focusing on the worst of the worst, but they took us off of these quality cases to do this, which never should have happened in the first place," the East Coast officer said.</p> <p>That "never should have happened" remark referred to the way the migrants were handled at the border.</p>

When illegal immigrants are caught and released, they are usually served with court summonses, known in the field as a Notice to Appear.

But during the initial wave of the Biden border surge last year, the number of migrants caught and released was so overwhelming that Border Patrol agents were instructed not to do the full processing of an NTA and instead issue a Notice to Report.

Issuing an NTA can take 90 minutes to fill out the forms, while issuing an NTR can take just a small fraction of that time. That meant agents could move migrants through the processing more quickly.

Rodney Scott, who was chief of the Border Patrol at the time, said it was a calculated decision designed to get agents back into the field quickly so they could try to detect other illegal crossings.

“We carved out the groups of individuals that the Biden administration had already said were going to be released, and only after we did records checks,” he told The Times.

Mr. Scott said they knew the chance that the migrants would ever be removed from the U.S., whether they were issued NTAs or not, was close to zero, so the balance of risks made it more important to speed through them to get agents back on the line.

“We decided to prioritize national security and having agents on the border,” he said.

An NTA enters a migrant into deportation proceedings. Migrants can be ordered removed by immigration judges if they don’t show up for their hearings.

Those given NTRs are not officially in deportation court proceedings. Instead, an NTR asks them to check in with an ICE office within 60 days and, usually, to collect an NTA.

Tens of thousands have failed to do so.

In communications to Congress, Mr. Mayorkas revealed that from late March to the end of July last year, 104,171 illegal immigrants were caught and released with NTRs. About half had failed to check in.

ICE was then assigned cleanup duty.

The agency tried to send NTAs to the addresses that the migrants reported to border authorities, but in many cases, the addresses were bad. ICE decided to pull its fugitive operations teams off their normal duties and try to clean up the mess by tracking down the absconders in communities.

ICE’s Law Enforcement Support Center, based in Vermont, was roped in to come up with addresses to give to the fugitive teams. The problem, officers said, is that they had little to work with and the migrants haven’t been in the U.S. long enough to develop the kind of electronic trail that would help track them down.

Even when the right street address was included, the apartment number might have been wrong. That left officers with the choice of giving up or knocking on all the doors in a building — which could feed into fears of ICE “raids.”

Of the 600 or so migrants tracked down, some were issued NTAs on the spot. Others were issued ICE’s Form G-56 instructing them to check in at an ICE office.

That meant even more processing time, which meant less time out looking for high-value targets, officers said.

	<p>The officers were particularly frustrated at having to play cleanup. If the Department of Homeland Security had been on top of the situation, they said, the migrants would have been served NTAs in the usual way at the border and ICE's fugitive operations teams never would have been dragged into the matter.</p> <p>It was particularly galling to officers because, even if they did track down one of the border migrants, they weren't arresting or detaining them, merely issuing new paperwork, officers said.</p> <p>"If I wasn't going after that guy, I could be going after another guy I could potentially be taking into custody or removing," the West Coast officer told The Times.</p> <p>It's not clear what Homeland Security's next steps are for the tens of thousands of migrants who couldn't be found. One of the ICE officers said the fugitive teams have been told to expect ongoing operations to try to track down the absconders.</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	07/29 Climate change melting Alps' glaciers
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2022/jul/29/how-climate-change-is-melting-the-alps-glaciers-in-pictures
GIST	<p>From the way 45-year-old Swiss glaciologist Andreas Linsbauer bounds over icy crevasses, you would never guess he was carrying 10kg of steel equipment needed to chart the decline of Switzerland's glaciers.</p> <p>Normally, he heads down this path on the massive Morteratsch glacier in late September, the end of the summer melt season in the Alps. But exceptionally high ice loss this year has brought him to this 15 sq km (six sq mile) amphitheatre of ice two months early for emergency maintenance work.</p> <p>The measuring poles he uses to track changes in the depth of the pack are at risk of dislodging entirely as the ice melts away, and he needs to drill new holes.</p> <p>The Alps' glaciers are on track for their highest mass losses in at least 60 years of record keeping, data shared exclusively with Reuters shows. By looking at the difference in how much snow fell in winter, and how much ice melts in the summer, scientists can measure how much a glacier has shrunk in any given year.</p> <p>Since last winter, which brought relatively little snowfall, the Alps have sweltered through two big early-summer heatwaves, including one in July marked by temperatures near 30C (86F) in the Swiss mountain village of Zermatt.</p> <p>During this heatwave, the elevation at which water froze was measured at a record high of 5,184 metres (17,000 feet) – an altitude higher than Mont Blanc – compared with the normal summer level of 3,000-3,500 metres.</p> <p>"It's really obvious that this is an extreme season," Linsbauer said, shouting over the roar of rushing meltwater as he checked the height of a pole jutting out of the ice.</p> <p>Most of the world's mountain glaciers are retreating due to climate change. But those in the European Alps are especially vulnerable because they are smaller, with relatively little ice cover. Meanwhile, temperatures in the Alps are warming at about 0.3C a decade – twice as fast as the global average.</p> <p>If greenhouse gas emissions continue to rise, the Alps glaciers are expected to lose more than 80% of their current mass by 2100. Many will disappear regardless of whatever action is taken now, thanks to global warming baked in by past emissions, according to a 2019 report by the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.</p>

Already, Morteratsch is much changed from the glacier depicted on the region's tourist maps. The long tongue that once reached deep into the valley below has shrunk back by nearly two miles, while the depth of the snow and ice pack has thinned by up to 200 metres.

The smaller Pers glacier flowed into it until 2017, when it receded so much that it detached. However, glaciologists still often group them together with the Morteratsch complex.

The dire situation this year raises concerns that the Alps' glaciers might vanish sooner than expected. With more years like 2022, that could happen, said Matthias Huss, who leads Glacier Monitoring in Switzerland (GLAMOSGlamos).

"We are seeing model results expected a few decades in the future are happening now," Huss said. "I did not expect to see such an extreme year so early in the century."

Glaciologists in Austria, France and Italy confirmed that glaciers there were on track for record losses. In Austria "the glaciers are snow-free up to the summits," said Andrea Fischer, a glaciologist at the Austrian Academy of Sciences.

Seasonal snowfall, apart from replenishing ice lost during summer, protects glaciers from further melt by providing a white cover that reflects sunlight back out to atmosphere better than darker ice – sullied by dust or pollution – can do.

But at the Grand Etret glacier in north-west Italy, only 1.3 metres of snow had accumulated during this past winter – 2 metres less than the annual average for the 20 years up to 2020.

This year's Alpine ice losses, registered even before the biggest melt month of August, surprised scientists to some extent as many of the glaciers had already lost their lower-lying snouts. Because they had retreated up the mountain, where temperatures are cooler, scientists thought they should have been better protected.

"You can easily imagine the final results after summer will be extensive loss of glacier coverage in the Italian Alps," said Marco Giardino, vice-president of the Italian Glaciological Committee.

Data shared exclusively with Reuters shows that Morteratsch is now shedding about 5cm a day and is already in a worse state than it would normally be at the end of an average summer, according to data from Glamor and the Université libre de Bruxelles.

The nearby Silvretta glacier has lost about a metre more than at the same point in 1947 – the worst year in its database stretching back to 1915.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	07/28 DOH: avoid Orcas Island shellfish
SOURCE	https://www.q13fox.com/news/unsafe-levels-of-paralytic-shellfish-poison-detected-in-orcas-island-shellfish https://www.q13fox.com/news/unsafe-levels-of-paralytic-shellfish-poison-detected-in-orcas-island-shellfish
GIST	<p>The Washington State Department of Health (DOH) is urging people to avoid eating oysters and clams harvested from Buck Bay on Orcas Island in San Juan County, following the detection of high levels of Paralytic Shellfish Poison (PSP) in the shellfish.</p> <p>The Buck Bay Shellfish Farm retail market, along with restaurants on Orcas Island, sold the now recalled shellfish directly to consumers.</p> <p>Through biotoxin monitoring, DOH found that the shellfish had PSP levels nearly four times the allowable level for harvest. As of July 27, there have been no reports of illness, but Buck Bay Growing Area is closed until further notice.</p>

PSP is a naturally occurring marine biotoxin produced by some species of microscopic algae. Shellfish eat these algae and can retain the toxin, which is not destroyed by cooking or freezing.

PSP symptoms can occur within minutes to a few hours of consuming contaminated shellfish. Death from PSP has occurred in less than 30 minutes. Symptoms can include:

- Tingling and numbness of the lips, tongue, fingers and toes.
- Nausea, vomiting and diarrhea.
- In severe cases, loss of coordination, difficulty speaking and swallowing and total muscular paralysis with respiratory arrest.

If you have mild symptoms, call your health care provider right away. If symptoms are severe, call 911 or go to the emergency room.

A list of areas closed for biotoxin can be found on DOH's [Shellfish Safety Map](#).

[Return to Top](#)

Crime, Criminals

[Top of page](#)

HEADLINE	07/29 New Zealand: 15yr-old boy sentenced to life
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jul/29/new-zealand-15-year-old-boy-receives-life-sentence-for
GIST	<p>A New Zealand court has sentenced a 15-year-old boy to life in prison for a murder committed when he was 14.</p> <p>The sentencing coincides with a separate legal challenge to the country's practice of giving children life sentences, which advocates argue is "harmful and ineffective". New Zealand's sentencing laws currently presume a life sentence for those found guilty of murder, unless it is "manifestly unjust" to do so.</p> <p>The boy, whose name has been suppressed, stabbed 22-year-old Bram Willems in Paihia last year. The attack occurred after the pair had spent an afternoon together, consuming alcohol and cannabis.</p> <p>Outlining the facts of the case at the high court sentencing on Friday, justice Timothy Brewer said the accused got into an argument and stabbed Willems after the victim acted inappropriately towards the teenager's female cousin.</p> <p>Media outlet Stuff reported from the hearing that Willems' mother, Christy Lacroix, told the court: "You have taken a life that was worth living, a life that I fought for, for 22 years. No excuses could justify taking a life."</p> <p>Brewer said life imprisonment was appropriate in this case, despite the youth's age. He said youth was not an unusual feature of offences of serious violence, and carried little weight against the public interest. He imposed a minimum non-parole period of 10 years.</p> <p>Brewer agreed with the Crown prosecutor's argument that there was no reason to displace the presumptive life sentence for murder, but also said there was no reason to increase the 10-year minimum term, the New Zealand Herald reported.</p> <p>Separately, the court of appeal is currently considering the cases of three young convicted murderers who appealed against life sentences. The case forms the basis for a broader challenge, asking if it is "manifestly unjust" to sentence children and young people to life sentences.</p>

	<p>Aphiphany Forward-Taua, executive director of criminal justice reform organisation JustSpeak, said that New Zealand’s sentencing framework for murder should be reformed, to reflect that teenagers and children didn’t have the neurological development of adults.</p> <p>“Brain development isn’t fully achieved until the age of 24,” she said.</p> <p>“In a lot of these young offender cases we see a pattern of behaviour that, in our view, correlates to the lack of neurological development ... These young people unfortunately, they make these decisions, and often they don’t actually anticipate the outcome.”</p> <p>Forward-Taua said sentencing, particularly for young offenders, should be more focused on rehabilitation over punishment.</p> <p>Last year, in a joint statement, the children’s commissioner and psychology and law academics called for an end to life sentences for children, calling them “harmful and ineffective”.</p> <p>“No child or young person should be sentenced in the adult criminal justice system,” they wrote.</p> <p>“Punitive adult sentences, such as life imprisonment and minimum non-parole periods, should not be available for children and young persons.”</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	07/28 Downtown Spokane 4 suspected arson fires
SOURCE	https://www.krem.com/article/news/crime/investigators-suspect-four-fires-downtown-spokane/293-e2ff596c-0935-4ce4-9564-4ae1436e1512
GIST	<p>SPOKANE, Wash. — Investigators are currently searching for a suspected arsonist who reportedly started four fires in the downtown Spokane area on Thursday.</p> <p>According to Spokane Fire Chief Brian Schaeffer, the fires were lit around noon in the area of Erie and E. Sprague. He was riding his bike on the trail and lighting fires as he went.</p> <p>No significant damage was reported from the fires, but they did cause traffic delays. A train was also delayed.</p> <p>The suspect is described as a white man on a yellow bicycle.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	07/28 Mayor orders SPD assign sex assault cases
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/times-watchdog/seattle-mayor-orders-plan-for-stalled-sexual-assault-investigations-as-advocates-demand-deadline/
GIST	<p>As frustrated advocates demanded a deadline for the city to fix stalled sexual assault investigations at the Seattle Police Department, Seattle Mayor Bruce Harrell on Thursday ordered that all felony cases with enough evidence for follow-up be assigned to detectives by the end of next month.</p> <p>The executive order, which Harrell’s office said was done in collaboration with interim police Chief Adrian Diaz, also calls for a “systemic review” of the Police Department’s practices around major crime investigations, better notification of case progress for victims and increased funding for victim support, among other changes.</p> <p>The announcement came as a coalition of local sexual assault resource and health care organizations prepared to send a letter Thursday to Harrell’s office, police and prosecutors, calling on them to guarantee timely investigations of reported sexual assaults and to launch a new panel to oversee other reforms this year.</p>

“The Seattle Police Department has a responsibility for the public safety for all of its citizens and they are not fulfilling that,” said Seattle Indian Health Board executive vice president and letter co-author Abigail Echo-Hawk. “It’s unfathomable.”

Echo-Hawk, who is a citizen of the Pawnee Nation, has for years spoken publicly about her own rape in connection with high rates of violence against Native women and girls. She said she was “tired of the token words of equity” from the city over its treatment of sexual assault survivors.

The groups said they’d waited weeks to see a proposal from the city after [reporting from The Seattle Times and KUOW](#) revealed that sexual assault cases involving adult victims were not being investigated in the department’s understaffed sexual assault and child abuse unit.

Minutes before they sent the letter Thursday, Harrell’s office issued an executive order directing the Seattle Police Department to work with national policing and criminal legal system experts to conduct a review of their investigations bureau. It also mandates that every reported felony crime of violence “with sufficient evidence allowing for a follow-up investigation” be assigned to a case detective by Aug. 31, in an attempt to address the current backlog of stalled sexual assault cases.

It’s unclear, however, how many backlogged cases will be assigned to detectives — and of the cases assigned to detectives, how many will be investigated in a timely way.

“Not all such cases can be currently assigned, particularly backlogged cases, given staffing limitations,” mayoral spokesperson Jamie Housen said by email.

The order demands an “unprecedented evaluation of issues created by SPD’s staffing shortage and systemic problems created over decades,” Harrell said in a news release Thursday. “We are acting to learn from and rectify those challenges to create change, now and long-term.”

In April, the sergeant of the Police Department’s sexual assault and child abuse unit [wrote in an internal memo](#) to Diaz that she had too few detectives to investigate sexual assault reports with adult victims and had stopped assigning those cases.

Harrell [subsequently called](#) the department’s backlog of stalled cases “unacceptable” and said the city would “indeed make sure that we are providing optimal service, both for investigation and victim survivor support, here this year.” Seattle police have added two positions to the unit this year.

The sergeant who wrote the memo, Pamela St. John, has since become the [target of an Office of Police Accountability investigation](#) into the leak of the document.

Hiring officers

The Seattle Police Department’s officer shortage has become a core focus for Harrell’s administration.

Earlier this month, Harrell unveiled a [\\$2 million plan](#) to recruit more officers to a department that has lost more than 400 sworn employees since 2020. Harrell’s plan would offer up to \$30,000 in hiring bonuses for lateral transfers from other departments, \$7,500 for new recruits and aim to hire 500 officers over five years.

Yet advocates say hiring more officers won’t automatically fix long-standing issues in the way the city responds to reports of sexual assault. The groups say they’ve been pointing out problems with the way the city and county handle sexual assault investigations for years.

Riddhi Mukhopadhyay, letter co-author and executive director of the Sexual Violence Law Center, said that hiring additional officers won’t matter if they’re “being directed towards property crimes” or other nonviolent offenses and not responding to sexual assault or domestic violence cases.

King County Sexual Assault Resource Center CEO and letter co-author Mary Ellen Stone said she had “stressed with the mayor this problem existed well before the pandemic.”

But Stone said that Harrell’s executive order, if implemented, could make a difference.

“What the mayor’s committing to do is a big deal,” she said.

Over the last 2½ years, the overall number of officers and detectives in investigative units has shrunk, while other parts of the department have grown. Percentages of the department’s available officers in patrol and operations support have increased since 2020 — and the department’s unit dedicated to homeless encampments gained seven officers this year alone.

Low staff numbers within the sexual assault unit have resulted in low morale and burned-out employees, a detective inside this unit previously told The Seattle Times and KUOW.

Last year, the department received 200 reports of rape, according to departmental crime data. But while sexual assault detectives work on child and adult cases that require time-consuming work, those detectives are also drafted by the department to cover traffic and security at sports games and major events.

Public safety has been, and continues to be, the city of Seattle’s largest category of spending from its general fund.

The city spent \$536.5 million on public safety in 2021, nearly 13% of its total expenses, and nearly 23% of its governmental activities, according to city fiscal documents.

Fewer reports referred

Referrals from the Seattle Police Department to King County prosecutors have slowed to a trickle this year, according to an analysis of King County Prosecuting Attorney’s Office data.

Seattle police have sent just 28 felony cases involving assault with sexual motivation, attempted rape and rape to King County prosecutors through June 27 of this year, compared to 89 referrals in 2021; 129 in 2020; and 156 in 2019.

“Survivors of sexual assaults need to be heard,” said Casey McNerthney, spokesperson for the King County Prosecuting Attorney’s Office.

To charge a case, prosecutors need detectives who can forward their investigations, McNerthney said, adding that the office supports Harrell and others working toward additional police resources.

Meanwhile, advocates worry that a delay in Seattle police response to cases also means a delay in connecting victims with resources.

“We are getting, regularly, calls from victims saying, ‘I made a report, a month, two months ago, and I’m not hearing anything,’ ” said Stone, of the King County Sexual Assault Resource Center.

In some parts of the country, the federal government has launched investigations into police departments accused of neglecting their sexual assault caseloads. Last month, the Department of Justice announced an investigation into the New York City Police Department’s special victims division after the feds received reports of failures to investigate cases and poor treatment of sexual assault survivors going back a decade.

But Stone is optimistic about changes in Seattle.

“Let’s fix something we know has been a problem for years and years,” Stone added. “We owe it to rape victims choosing to report.”

HEADLINE	07/28 Data: 1-in-3 killed by police were 'fleeing'
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/jul/28/hunted-one-in-three-people-killed-by-us-police-were-fleeing-data-reveals
GIST	<p>Nearly one third of people killed by US police since 2015 were running away, driving off or attempting to flee when the officer fatally shot or used lethal force against them, data reveals.</p> <p>In the past seven years, police in America have killed more than 2,500 people who were fleeing, and those numbers have slightly increased in recent years, amounting to an average of roughly one killing a day of someone running or trying to escape, according to Mapping Police Violence, a research group that tracks lethal force cases.</p> <p>In many cases, the encounters started as traffic stops, or there were no allegations of violence or serious crimes prompting police contact. Some were shot in the back while running and others were passengers in fleeing cars.</p> <p>Two recent cases have sparked national outrage and protests. In Akron, Ohio, on 27 June, officers fired dozens of rounds at Jayland Walker, who was unarmed and running when he was killed. And last week, an officer in San Bernardino, California, exited an unmarked car and immediately fired at Robert Adams as he ran in the opposite direction.</p> <p>Despite a decades-long push to hold officers accountable for killing civilians, prosecution remains exceedingly rare, the data shows. Of the 2,500 people killed while fleeing since 2015, only 50 or 2% have resulted in criminal charges. The majority of those charges were either dismissed or resulted in acquittals. Only nine officers were convicted, representing 0.35% of cases.</p> <p>The data, advocates and experts say, highlights how the US legal system allows officers to kill with impunity and how reform efforts have not addressed fundamental flaws in police departments.</p> <p>“In 2014 and 2015, at the beginning of this national conversation about racism in policing, the idea was, ‘There are bad apples in police departments, and if we just charged or fired those particularly bad officers, we could save lives and stop police violence,’” said Samuel Sinyangwe, data scientist and policy analyst who founded Mapping Police Violence, but “this data shows that this is much bigger than any individual officer.”</p> <p>‘Hunted down’</p> <p>US police kill more people in days than many countries do in years, with roughly 1,100 fatalities a year since 2013. The numbers haven’t changed since the start of the Black Lives Matter movement, and they haven’t budged since George Floyd’s murder inspired international protests in 2020.</p> <p>The law has for years allowed police to kill civilians in a wide variety of circumstances. In 1985, the US supreme court ruled that officers can only use lethal force against a fleeing person if they reasonably believed that person was an imminent threat. But the court later said that an officer’s state of mind and fear in the moment was relevant to determining whether the shooting was warranted. That means a killing could be considered justified if the officer claimed he feared the person was armed or saw them gesturing toward their waistband – even if it turned out the victim was unarmed and the threat was nonexistent.</p> <p>As a result, very few police officers get charged. Adante Pointer, a civil rights lawyer, said it was not hard for officers to prevail when the case boiled down to what was going through the minds of the officer and victim in the moment: “The only person left to tell the story is the cop.”</p> <p>In 2022 through mid-July, officers have killed 633 people, including 202 who were fleeing. In 2021, 368 victims were fleeing (32% of all killings); in 2020, 380 were fleeing (33%); and in 2019, 325 were fleeing (30%), according to Mapping Police Violence. The data is based on media reports of people who were trying to escape when they were killed, and it is considered incomplete. In roughly 10% to 20% of all cases each year, the circumstances surrounding the shootings are unclear.</p>

Black Americans are disproportionately affected, making up 32% of individuals killed by police while fleeing, but only accounting for 13% of the US population. Black victims were even more overrepresented in cases involving people fleeing on foot, making up 35% to 54% of those fatalities.

“If a person is running away, there is no reason to chase them, hunt them down like an animal and shoot and kill them,” said Paula McGowan, whose son, [Ronell Foster](#), was killed while fleeing in Vallejo, California, in February 2018. The officer, Ryan McMahon, said he was trying to stop Foster, a 33-year-old father of two, because he was riding his bike without a light. Within roughly one minute of trying to stop him, the officer engaged in a struggle and shot Foster in the back of the head. Officials later claimed that the unarmed man had grabbed his flashlight and presented it “in a threatening manner”.

“These officers are too amped up and ready to shoot,” said McGowan, who for years advocated that the officer be fired and prosecuted. Instead, the officer went on to shoot another Black man, [Willie McCoy](#), one year later; he was one of six officers who fatally shot the 20-year-old who had been sleeping in his car. The officer was terminated in 2020 – not for killing McCoy or Foster, but because the department said he put other officers in danger during the shooting of McCoy.

The city paid Foster’s family \$5.7m in a civil [settlement](#) in 2020, but did not admit wrongdoing. A lawyer for McMahon previously [said](#) the officer was attempting to “simply talk to Mr Foster” when he fled, adding that McMahon “believed his actions were reasonable under the circumstances”. Vallejo police did not respond to a request for comment.

“Not only do these officers get away with it, they get to move on to bigger and better jobs while we’re left shattered and are still trying to pick up the pieces,” said Miguel Minjares, whose niece, 16-year-old Elena “Ebbie” Mondragon, was killed by Fremont, California, police.

In March 2017, undercover officers fired at a car that was fleeing, striking Mondragon, who was a passenger and pregnant at the time. The officers faced no criminal consequences. One sergeant went on to work as a sniper for the department, though has since retired, and another involved in the operation continued working as a training officer, records show.

“You shoot into a moving car, which you shouldn’t have done, and you weren’t even close to hitting the person you were trying to target. And now you’re a sniper?” said Minjares. “When I hear sniper, I think of precision. It boggles my mind. It shows the entitlement of officers and the police department, they just put people where they want them, it doesn’t matter what they did. It’s confusing and it’s heart wrenching.”

In June, five years after the killing, the family won \$21m in a civil trial, but it’s unclear if Fremont has changed any of its policies or practices.

A Fremont spokesperson declined to comment on the Mondragon case and did not respond to questions about its policies.

The push to prevent the killings

In the rare cases when prosecutors do file criminal charges against police who killed fleeing people, the process often takes years and typically concludes with victory for the officer, either with judges or prosecutors themselves dismissing the charges or jury acquittals.

In one Florida case where an officer was investigating a shoplifting and fatally shot a man fleeing in a van, prosecutors filed charges and then [dropped the case](#) a week later, saying that after a review of evidence, it “became apparent it would be incredibly difficult to obtain a conviction”. In a Hawaii case where officers killed a 16-year-old in a car, a judge last year [rejected](#) all charges and prevented the case from going to trial.

For the nine fleeing cases where officers were found guilty or signed a plea deal, the conviction and sentence were much lighter than typical homicides. A Georgia officer who killed an unarmed man fleeing on foot was [acquitted of manslaughter](#) in 2019, for example, but found guilty of violating his oath and

given one year in prison. A San Diego sheriff's deputy pleaded guilty earlier this year to voluntary manslaughter after he killed a fleeing man, but he avoided state prison, instead getting [one year in jail](#). And a Tennessee deputy, [found guilty](#) of criminally negligent homicide after shooting at a fleeing car and killing the passenger, a 20-year-old woman, was sentenced to community service.

With the criminal system deeming nearly all of these killings lawful, advocates have argued that cities should reduce the unnecessary police encounters that can turn deadly, such as ending traffic stops for minor violations and removing police from mental health calls. There's also been a growing effort to ban officers from shooting at moving cars.

California passed a major law in 2019 meant to [restrict use of deadly force](#) to cases when it was "necessary" to defend human life, not just "reasonable", and stating that an officer can only kill a fleeing person if they believe that person is going to imminently harm someone. The new law also dictated that prosecutors must consider the officer's actions leading up to the killing, which police groups had argued were irrelevant under the previous standards.

But after its passage, police departments across the state refused to comply and update their policies, said Adrienna Wong, senior staff attorney at the ACLU of southern California, which backed the bill. That's only now starting to change after years of legal disputes.

"I think we're going to start to see prosecutors consider all the elements of the new law, but I'm frankly not holding my breath based on the track record of prosecutors in the state. We never thought this law was going to be a full solution."

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	07/28 Detainees sue Indiana jail: rapes, assaults
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/07/28/us/indiana-jail-rape-lawsuit.html
GIST	<p>Twenty-eight female detainees at an Indiana jail have alleged in two separate federal lawsuits that they were raped or assaulted last year by male detainees who paid a jail officer for access to keys to their cells.</p> <p>One of the lawsuits, filed on Monday, says that the plaintiffs, identified as Jane Does 1 through 8, were incarcerated at the Clark County jail in Jeffersonville, Ind., last October when they were subjected to a "night of terror." Another lawsuit, filed in June by 20 other women who were also incarcerated there, also alleges they were assaulted, and that at least two of them were raped, in the same episode.</p> <p>Both lawsuits, filed in U.S. District Court for the Southern District of Indiana, name Sheriff Jamey Noel of Clark County; David Lowe, a former Clark County jail officer; and other officers at the jail in Jeffersonville as defendants. The assaults began on the night of Oct. 23, according to the filings, and lasted for several hours into the morning.</p> <p>The lawsuit filed this week alleges that Mr. Lowe gave two male detainees access to keys to restricted parts of the jail, including a section called Pod 4 that housed women, in exchange for \$1,000. The two men and other male detainees used the keys to enter Pod 4 and "raped, assaulted, harassed, threatened and intimidated" the plaintiffs and other women "for several hours, resulting in significant physical and emotional injuries," the lawsuit says.</p> <p>The jail officers on duty had access to live camera and audio feeds of the assaults, it said. The male inmates covered their faces so they could not be identified and threatened the women if they called for help or pressed the emergency button that would notify guards, according to the suit.</p> <p>The women tried to hide under blankets, in the bathroom or in dark corners, it says.</p> <p>"Amazingly, even though there were surveillance cameras positioned in locations that showed the male detainees accessing the women's pods, and even though the incident involved multiple male detainees and dozens of victims over an extended period of time, not a single jail officer on duty that night came to the aid of the plaintiffs and the other victims," it said.</p>

A statement released on Wednesday by Sheriff Noel's attorney, Larry Wilder, described the events as "the unforeseeable criminal actions of a rogue corrections officer." It said that "jail command" became aware of what had taken place when a lawyer for one of the women informed them about it on the morning of Oct. 24, hours after the assaults. Mr. Lowe was fired within 24 hours and arrested within 48 hours, the statement said.

Mr. Lowe was charged with aiding, inducing or causing escape, and official misconduct, both felonies, according to court documents. He was also charged with trafficking with an inmate, a misdemeanor, documents say. His trial is scheduled for November, records show. Mr. Lowe's lawyer did not immediately return a phone call seeking comment on Wednesday.

The sheriff's statement said that the detective division of the Clark County Sheriff's Office had interviewed the women who were in the pod that evening. "These interviews have yielded information that is in direct opposition to the allegations made in the civil lawsuit," it said.

The investigation "seems to indicate that there was a systematic plan by individuals who were incarcerated that evening to develop the narrative that makes up the crux of the claims in the civil case," the statement said.

Stephen Wagner, the lawyer who filed the lawsuit this week on behalf of eight of the women, said that it was "disheartening" to suggest that the women may have "made up" the allegations. After being threatened by the male assailants, the women, he added, had been left in a "constant state of fear."

"In this environment, given the threats of the assailants and the utter lack of sympathy — or protection — by jail officials, the women, understandably, initially kept quiet about what happened," Mr. Wagner said.

The lawsuit claims that jail officials "punished the women" after the episode by leaving lights on for 72 hours, placing them on "lockdown" and confiscating personal property, including pillows, blankets and personal hygiene items.

It blames Sheriff Noel for failing to properly staff the jail and train employees, and for failing to supervise the jail. "These systemic failures allowed numerous male assailants to have free run of the jail for several hours, resulting in a night of terror for the plaintiffs and other victims," the filing said.

The statement provided by Mr. Wilder said Sheriff Noel was committed to ensuring that "nothing of this magnitude or scope" could happen, but he "is equally committed to debunking those untruths that have been alleged by those who are attempting to reap financial gain from the crimes of David Lowe."

Sheriff Noel, an elected official serving his second term, is continuing in his duties, Mr. Wilder said. The women are seeking a jury trial and compensatory damages to cover medical and counseling costs, pain and suffering, emotional distress and lawyers' fees.

According to the lawsuit filed in June, two male inmates used the keys to enter the female pods at about 11:30 p.m. on Oct. 23 and threatened to kill the women if they called for officers.

The two men left, and then returned with several other inmates who wore towels and blankets covering their heads and faces, according to the suit. The male inmates grabbed and groped the female inmates, exposed their genitals to the females, and made sexual and threatening statements, according to documents. At least two of the female inmates were raped, the documents allege.

"After multiple hours, a female inmate hit the emergency button and began screaming to call for the correction officers. The male inmates retreated," documents say, adding that the women involved had "suffered horrific physical and psychological injuries."

	<p>In 2016, The Louisville Courier-Journal reported that the jail was featured on a reality television show, “60 Days In,” which “exposed misbehavior” among officers there. The show, the paper reported, prompted a series of firings and resignations of corrections officers.</p> <p>Mr. Wagner, the lawyer who filed the lawsuit this week, said that he hoped evidence of a history of bad behavior by officers at the jail would help bolster his case. The details of that night, he added, had left many lingering questions about the conduct of officers on duty.</p> <p>“There are 400 or so inmates, and that requires a lot of officers,” he said. “Who was watching the surveillance video for those two hours?”</p> <p>He added: “Did other officers look the other way while these events took place? Or were they simply not doing their job?”</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	07/28 FBI: suspect wanted to kill 3 justices
SOURCE	https://www.newsmax.com/newsfront/brett-kavanaugh-abortion-roe-v-wade/2022/07/28/id/1080840/
GIST	<p>Documents uncovered during the investigation of the attempted assassination of Supreme Court Justice Brett Kavanaugh show that the suspect wanted to kill three justices so that votes on the court would be changed for "decades to come," according to authorities.</p> <p>In an FBI warrant released on Thursday, suspect Nicholas John Roske allegedly said that he wanted to kill two other justices, NewsNation reports. It is not known who the other justices are, but a search of his computer history shows conversations on Reddit and other online platforms where he says he would stop Roe v. Wade from being overturned.</p> <p>When he was asked how he would achieve this, he said he was going to remove some people from the Supreme Court.</p> <p>"Yeah but I could get at least one, which would change the votes for decades to come, and I am shooting for three," Roske wrote. "Shooting for three."</p> <p>Roske, 26, was arrested in the early morning hours of June 8 after calling 911 on himself standing near Kavanaugh's home. He had traveled from his Simi Valley, California, home, with weapons in a backpack, but he stopped when he saw U.S. Marshals stationed outside the justice's house.</p> <p>He told a dispatcher he had planned to kill Kavanaugh and that he was suffering from psychiatric issues. He faces attempted murder charges.</p> <p>Roske's internet search history included the "quietest semi-auto rifle," "effective place to stab someone," and "how to be stealthy."</p> <p>The homes of Kavanaugh and the other conservative justices had been the subject of protests after a leaked ruling that correctly predicted the eventual overturning of the 1973 Roe v. Wade Supreme Court decision that had outlawed states' bans on abortion.</p> <p>Roske's plot to kill presumably conservative justices would allow President Joe Biden, a pro-choice Democrat, to appoint pro-Wade replacements at a time that the U.S. Senate has his Democratic vice president to break a tie if needed for confirmation in a 50-50 Democratic-Republican vote.</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	07/27 FBI investigates leader of 'Rapekrieg' group
SOURCE	https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/former-marine-accused-leading-neo-nazi-group-planning-attack-new-york-rcna40295

GIST

A former Marine is accused of leading a neo-Nazi group that was alleged to have been planning an attack on a New York synagogue.

Matthew Belanger is charged with gun violations and could spend up to 20 years in prison if he is convicted, according to court documents.

A criminal complaint filed last month in U.S. District Court for Hawaii alleged that Belanger, while he was serving as a Marine in Honolulu, paid a police officer on Long Island, New York, to buy him guns that he wouldn't be allowed to buy legally.

When the FBI questioned Belanger about guns he owned, he didn't mention a PTR assault rifle or a Luger-style pistol that he had the officer buy for him.

The FBI began investigating Belanger because it suspected he was planning to harm people and destroy property in hate-motivated attacks, according to court documents filed this month.

"The investigation was grounded in evidence that defendant was using social media to conspire with others, including members of a group called Rapekrieg, to commit ... hate crimes," the documents said.

The group, based on Long Island, "had procured weapons, uniforms, and tactical gear, and discussed committing attacks on a synagogue, Jewish persons, women, and minorities, including the rape of 'enemies' to injure, oppress, threaten, and intimidate, and the rape of white women to increase the production of white children in furtherance of Rapekrieg's goal of creating a white ethno-state through accelerationist means."

Other members of the group identified Belanger as a leader and administrator of the group, who had written Rapekrieg's manifesto.

"Rape, for example, is an extremely effective tool against our many foes, as its verbal use as a threat or direct use against an individual greatly reduces enemy morale and strikes a nameless fear in their hearts," read part of the manifesto, according to court documents. "While this is especially effective against females, the emasculated cesspool of progressive males is just as affected, being inherently effeminate themselves."

"If you have any doubts about being able to pull the trigger on a Jewish child, then you are not mentally prepared for the level of violence that first-world collapses will bring," read another part. "To be successful in this battle for survival, the white man must learn to hate, seeing red the moment he lays his eyes on a member of the race that has inflicted unspeakable horrors onto his people."

Rapekrieg members would conduct training once a year — since 2017 — using real firearms. They also trained with airsoft guns in woods across from a Long Island synagogue that they had initially planned to "shoot up," the documents said.

They later "decided that burning it down at night using Molotov cocktails was a better plan," according to the FBI.

The FBI's investigation into Belanger's social media accounts found he had a Facebook profile under the name Adolf Hitler, among others that he would use to procure guns.

Belanger is alleged to have had an account on Twitter under the name @Ishillingstein, which he said he used "to generate Black hate towards the Jewish community by making derogatory statements while disguised as a Jewish man," the court documents said.

Prosecutors released the additional information to persuade a judge to keep Belanger detained pending trial.

	<p>"Given that a sentence of imprisonment would force defendant to reside with members of racial and ethnic groups for which he has articulated extreme hate and whose existence he has advocated be eliminated through violence ... demonstrates that defendant is a risk of non-appearance or flight that cannot be reasonable mitigated by any condition of combination of conditions," prosecutors argued.</p> <p>The court denied Belanger's motion for release and detained him pending trial, according to documents filed Monday. He was being held at Federal Detention Center Honolulu.</p> <p>Attorneys for Belanger didn't immediately respond to a request for comment Wednesday. Belanger was discharged from the Marines under "other than honorable" conditions for misconduct, "specifically for dissident/extremist activity," in 2021, according to the FBI.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	07/28 Georgia woman dies falling out of patrol car
SOURCE	https://www.cbsnews.com/news/brianna-grier-georgia-woman-dies-falling-out-of-moving-patrol-car/
GIST	<p>Deputies in Georgia never closed a patrol car door after putting a 28-year-old handcuffed woman in the back seat during an arrest earlier this month, authorities said Wednesday. That woman, Brianna Marie Grier, fell out of the car while it was moving and died days later from her injuries, according to police.</p> <p>Grier was arrested at a home in Sparta, Georgia, on July 15, the Georgia Bureau of Investigation (GBI) said last week. She was put into the patrol car and was being driven to the Hancock County Sheriff's Office when she fell out of the patrol car and suffered "significant injuries," the GBI said at the time.</p> <p>She died of those injuries six days later, the GBI said. It's unclear why she was initially taken into custody.</p> <p>On Wednesday, the GBI said interviews, body camera footage and "mechanical tests" conducted on the patrol car revealed that the rear passenger side door of the car, near where Grier was sitting when she fell out, was "never closed" after she was placed in the vehicle.</p> <p>Grier was handcuffed in the front of her body and was not wearing a seatbelt, the GBI added.</p> <p>The GBI said that after her arrest, Grier "was on the ground refusing to get in" the vehicle near the driver's side door and told two deputies that "she was going to harm herself."</p> <p>One of the deputies then walked around to the other side of the car and opened the rear passenger side door, the GBI said. The deputy then returned to the driver's side door, and both deputies put her in the vehicle.</p> <p>"The investigation shows that the deputy thought he closed the rear passenger side door," the GBI wrote in its release. It did not elaborate.</p> <p>Body camera footage showed that the deputies had no contact with Grier from the time she got into the car to the time she fell out, the GBI said.</p> <p>Grier's family, meanwhile, has hired prominent attorney Ben Crump, who scheduled a news conference for Friday. In a statement Thursday, Crump alleged that Grier was arrested during a "mental health crisis."</p> <p>"Brianna Grier was a beautiful young mother who should still be alive," Crump said. "It is the responsibility of law enforcement to keep everyone in their custody safe and alive, including when there is a mental health crisis."</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	07/28 Anger: video of police beating pinned teen
SOURCE	https://www.cbsnews.com/amp/chicago/news/oak-lawn-police-beating-caught-on-video-teen-pinned-punched-hadi-abutella-live-stream/#app

OAK LAWN, Ill. (CBS) -- Disturbing video posted on social media shows three Oak Lawn police officers on top of a teenager, repeatedly punching him as he's pinned to the ground.

As CBS 2's Sabrina Franza reported, the boy's family organized a protest Thursday afternoon outside the Oak Lawn Police department, furious that a traffic stop landed their high school senior in the hospital at the hands of police.

Hadi Abutella's mother left her 17-year-old son's bedside Thursday afternoon to call for justice. He is hospitalized with a fracture to the back and severe internal bleeding.

"He has fractures all over his face, he's bruised, he's in the hospital right now with a neck brace," said Dena Natour. "Why did the police, over 300 pounds, attack my son that's only 115 pounds? Why did they do what they did? It's not called for, it's not necessary, and not acceptable. I want justice for my son. This is not acceptable."

Video shared on social media shows Oak Lawn police officers pinning Abutella to the ground, punching him over and over again as he lies on the pavement.

A bystander recorded the video with her cell phone.

Abutella's family said he was sitting in the passenger seat of his friend's car Wednesday afternoon when they were pulled over. They said they don't know what prompted the traffic stop, and have no idea why officers would use this level of force on the teenager. They said he was the only one in the car to whom this happened.

Ahmed Rehab, executive director of the Chicago chapter of the Council on American Islamic Relations, said Abutella is a student and a barber who has no criminal record.

While protest continued outside the station, Oak Lawn police held a news conference where they released dashcam video showing Abutella fleeing from the traffic stop -- leading to the chase. Police do not wear body cameras in Oak Lawn.

Oak Lawn police Chief Daniel Vittorio said an officer pulled over the car in which Abutella was riding near Southwest Highway and Austin Avenue. Police said they smelled burnt marijuana.

The driver complied during the traffic stop, but police said Abutella got out of the car and took off running, Vittorio said.

"He appeared to be nervous and had an accessory bag draped over his shoulder," Vittorio said.

Police said the bag is key, because as officers chased the teen to the intersection of 95th Street and McVicker Avenue, dashcam video shows police tackle the teen - and officers claim that Abutella kept reaching for the bag.

Police said Abutella "refused to listen to verbal commands which resulted in a physical confrontation with two officers."

After he was captured, Abutella tried to take control of the bag during the incident, police said.

Vittorio also mentioned that the officers feared Abutella was reaching for a weapon, and used control tactics to release the teen's hands.

He didn't stop resisting arrest until he was a stun gun was used, according to Chief Vittorio.

Officers found a Raven Arms P25.25 caliber gun in the bag loaded with three rounds of ammunition, Vittorio said.

Rehab said, regardless of the reason for chasing and arresting Abutella, he was on the ground, helpless, and not resisting when officers began punching him, even though he posed no threat to them. He said, although Abutella is expected to recover from his injuries, it's only a "stroke of luck" that he didn't suffer more serious injuries.

"The way that he was pounded and punched, this could have resulted in a permanent brain injury that changed the quality of life," he said. "Regardless of what he was accused of, we have a system in this country. You can subdue the suspect, you can arrest the suspect, handcuff them, proceed to ask them questions. The police department said that there was a gun found. They did not allege that this gun was brandished, that it was threatening them at any point."

Rehab also said the family believes if there was a gun found during the arrest, it was found in a bag after Abutella was in custody.

Even if Abutella was carrying a gun at the time, a legal expert said that is not a justification for officers to use excessive force.

"The only time that use of force and use of deadly force is justified is when there is a threat of force being directed at the officers, or actual force. The presence of a gun, by itself, does not indicate a threat with happening," said David Harris, a professor of law at the University of Pittsburgh School of Law who specializes in police issues.

Abutella's attorney, Zaid Abdallah, said the officers who beat him should be suspended, pending an investigation into the beating, and ultimately should be fired.

"This is not policing activity. This is a disgusting act of hate and malice," he said. "You could see, clearly, minutes pass as the officers have my client subdued; both of them, well over 200 pounds, on top of my client before punches to his head, slamming his head off the pavement. Punches to his body, crushing his bones. This was not a situation where they were trying to subdue a suspect. This was a situation that involved malice and hate from these officers."

Abdallah also disputed Oak Lawn Police Department's assertion that one of the officers involved had to go to the hospital.

"If he went to the hospital, he went to the hospital to have his knuckles checked from breaking them on my client's head," he said.

The offender and an officer were transported to Advocate Christ due to injuries due to the incident. The condition of the officer is unknown.

Chief Vittorio says there is an internal investigation of the use of excessive force used during the arrest. None of the officers have been placed on leave.

Charges are pending against the teen.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	07/28 Uvalde school principal reinstated
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/US/uvalde-principal-reinstated-robb-elementary-school-suspension/story?id=87600921
GIST	<p>Mandy Gutierrez, the principal of Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, Texas, was reinstated Thursday to her position, her attorney, Ricardo Cedillo, confirmed to ABC News.</p> <p>"Ms. Gutierrez's administrative leave with pay has been lifted and she has been fully reinstated to her position, where she will continue to discharge her duties and continue to serve all the families of the UCISD," a statement read.</p>

	<p>Uvalde Consolidated Independent School District superintendent Hal Harrell thanked Gutierrez in a letter obtained by ABC News for submitting responses to the House Investigative report into the May 24 mass shooting that left 19 children and two adults dead.</p> <p>"As a result of our review, you will be allowed to return to work," Harrell said in the letter.</p> <p>The reinstatement comes a day after Gutierrez responded to criticisms lodged against her and her leadership team by the special investigative committee of the Texas House.</p> <p>Gutierrez was suspended earlier in the week by Harrell. There was no reason given as to why Gutierrez was placed on administrative leave but the decision came two weeks after a report by the Texas legislative committee into the shooting. The report found that Gutierrez, in her first year at Robb Elementary School, was aware of security problems such as a door not locking properly for one of the classrooms the gunman entered, but did not fix them.</p> <p>Uvalde Schools Police Chief Pete Arredondo was placed on administrative leave without pay in June as the district considers the recommendation of firing him.</p>
Return to Top	

Information From Online Communities and Unclassified Sources/InFOCUS is a situational awareness report published daily by the Washington State Fusion Center.

If you no longer wish to receive this report, please submit an email to intake@wsfc.wa.gov and enter UNSUBSCRIBE InFOCUS in the Subject line.

DISCLAIMER - the articles highlighted within InFOCUS is for informational purposes only and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Washington State Fusion Center, the City of Seattle, the Seattle Police Department or the Washington State Patrol and have been included only for ease of reference and academic purposes.

FAIR USE Notice All rights to these copyrighted items are reserved. Articles and graphics have been placed within for educational and discussion purposes only, in compliance with 'Fair Use' criteria established in Section 107 of the Copyright Act of 1976. The principle of 'Fair Use' was established as law by Section 107 of The Copyright Act of 1976. 'Fair Use' legally eliminates the need to obtain permission or pay royalties for the use of previously copyrighted materials if the purposes of display include 'criticism, comment, news reporting, teaching, scholarship, and research.' Section 107 establishes four criteria for determining whether the use of a work in any particular case qualifies as a 'fair use'. A work used does not necessarily have to satisfy all four criteria to qualify as an instance of 'fair use'. Rather, 'fair use' is determined by the overall extent to which the cited work does or does not substantially satisfy the criteria in their totality. If you wish to use copyrighted material for purposes of your own that go beyond 'fair use,' you must obtain permission from the copyright owner. For more information go to: <http://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/17/107.shtml>

THIS DOCUMENT MAY CONTAIN COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL. COPYING AND DISSEMINATION IS PROHIBITED WITHOUT PERMISSION OF THE COPYRIGHT OWNERS.

Source: <http://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/17/107.shtml>

[Return to Top](#)

